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Tory wet dream

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THE FATE OF THE FOREST:

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This brilliant book, just published by Verso at £16.95, is essential reading for anyone interested in the fate of our planet and the peoples of the Amazonian rainforests.

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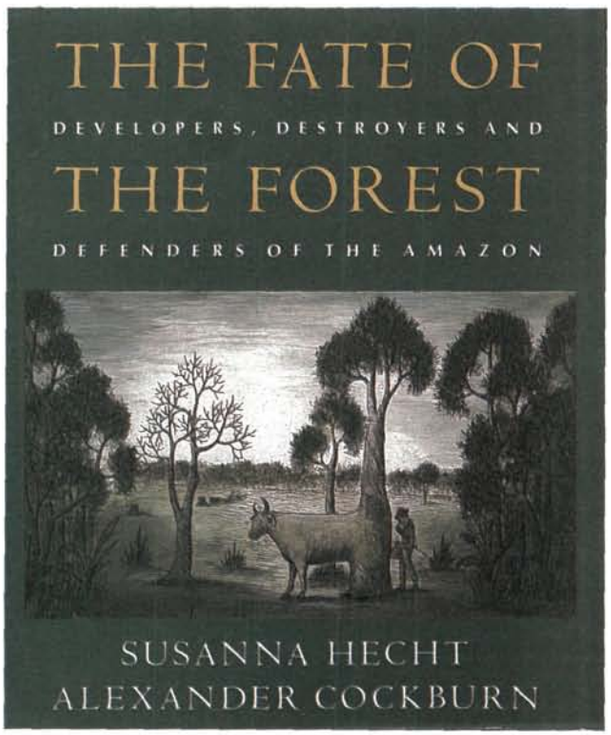
The Bookseller, *3 November 1989.*



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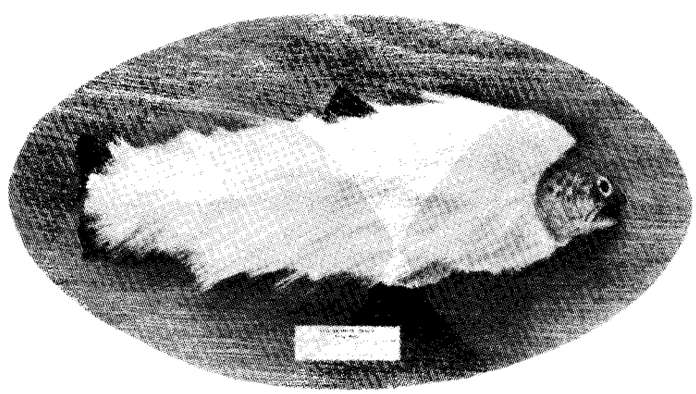

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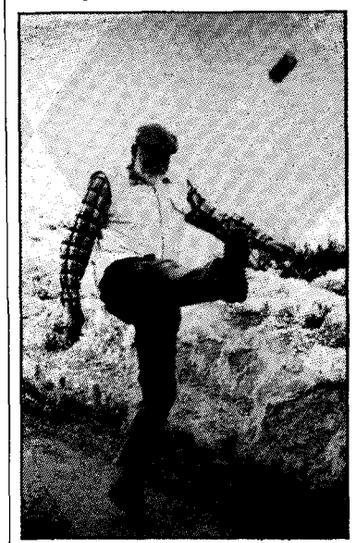

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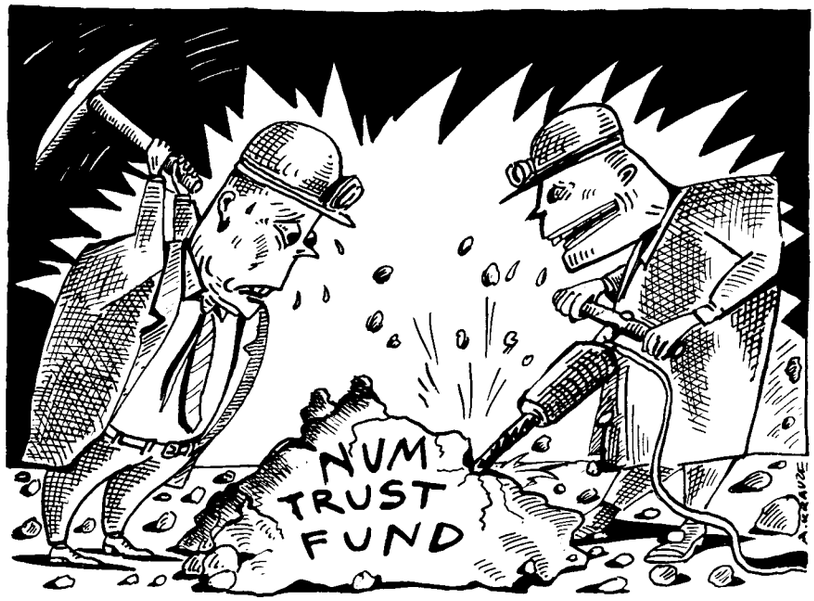
Striking Scargill

Beyond the details of Scargill's financial probity is the issue of democracy. It must be the key word for all the opposition



Andrzej Krauze

The news brings us pictures of a bronze statue of Lenin being blowtorched and hacksawed in Romania. In Britain, the press are hacking at the legs of another leader, the man who "walks on water" in the words of the miners' song: Arthur Scargill.

The charges against Scargill are extensive: that he repaid his personal mortgage with funds sent by the Libyan regime and intended for the miners' hardship fund; that he asked the Libyan representative, Altaf Abbasi, for arms; and that he routinely falsified the minutes of the NUM's national executive meetings. Scargill has vigorously denied all charges.

Two men are the principal witnesses for the prosecution and appear to have been paid handsomely by the *Daily Mirror* for their cooperation. The first is the NUM's former chief executive officer, Roger Windsor, who is known since the strike to have quarrelled with Scargill over the rights and wrongs of Windsor's setting up a company called "Oakedge" to supply the new NUM headquarters with furniture. The astonishing witness is Scargill's chauffeur, Jim Parker, who appeared on Roger Cook's programme. Parker was one of Scargill's few friends during his schooldays at a time when he was not popular, highly-strung, overweight, a mother's boy. Parker, who has known the president since the mid-fifties, deserts him now. Why? After all, Arthur Scargill is still president of one of the greatest unions in British Labour history. What is it that Jim Parker knows that we do not?

Let us say that the entire story of the mortgage, the connections with Libya, the guns, is a fabrication—it has, for the sake of argument, been planted by MI5 to distract attention from the poll tax. Let us suppose that what Arthur Scargill says is true—there was a "trust fund" that disgorged enormous quantities of cash, and whose every transaction was meticulously recorded and scrupulously audited.

If this is so why was the existence of this generous "trust fund" concealed from the struggling miners, from the national executive, and from the union's own officers? The demand for a public inquiry made from a number of quarters should be accepted without delay.

But there are larger issues at stake here than the probity of one man, demonised by some, deified by others. And they are to do with democracy. It was said during the miners' strike that all the decisions were taken by Arthur Scargill, his press secretary Nell Myers, and, ironically, his present accuser, Roger Windsor. Privy to these decisions was Scargill's minder-cum-chauffeur Jim Parker. A union with a great tradition of democracy was run in effect as the personal fiefdom of one man—Arthur Scargill. The left was used to having an unconstitutional influence over the decisions of the mineworkers' national executive through the Left Forum, which involved non-miners and met in advance of the NEC to "fix" the debates. But Arthur was outside even its control. Jim Parker, his chauffeur, knew more about the contacts with Libya than Mick McGahey, nominally the union's vice president.

In a real sense, this secrecy was a consequence of the absence of democracy. The striking miners and their support groups may have acted openly in the villages sustaining each other. But the miners' leadership without the initial ballot—and with the full force of the law ranged against it—increasingly retreated into back rooms. It was there, far from the gaze of the public and the miners they represented, that they conducted the strike. It may well be that the accusations levelled against Scargill are themselves the indirect result of that initial refusal to seek a mandate, and of the guarded operations that inevitably followed.

One wonders now how much longer unions can be led by men like Arthur Scargill. He has served as a role model for many of the current generation, and one sees shades of him in Ron Todd's TGWU which refuses the calls for an independent inquiry to identify the ballot-rigger at the heart of the organisation; and in Alan Sapper's committee which disqualified the successful moderate candidate for president of the ACTT because there were "too many words" in his campaign statement.

The price Scargill demanded for taking on Mrs Thatcher was that we should acquiesce in that initial undemocratic move, from which so much followed. The labour movement paid a heavy price. Democracy has been the watchword in eastern Europe—and it has toppled oppressive regimes. It's time the unions in Britain got out the hacksaws. At the very least the opposition cannot allow the present administration to claim democracy for its own.

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Here *Today*

There are apparently some innocents who believe that the accusations of left-wing bias against the Radio 4 *Today* programme can be warded off with rational argument. They should consider the experiences of TV producer Roger Bolton as chronicled in his *Death on the Rock and Other Stories* (published this week by W.H. Allen).

It was outrageous enough that an inquiry even had to be held into Bolton's examination of the Gibraltar shootings, and worse still that it was to be chaired by Lord Windlesham, an old friend of the foreign secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe. Against all the odds, the report exonerated the programme, but this had no effect whatever on the government's response. Mrs Thatcher dismissed the report out of hand.

Government ministers have become increasingly skilled at manipulating broadcasts to their own advantage. They refuse to be featured in "packages". Instead they insist on being interviewed live after the particular report has been broadcast. Or they refuse to be interviewed at all, thus often making the item impossible to broadcast for fear of provoking charges of imbalance. Sir Robin Day himself has pronounced the political interview dead, at the hands of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock who refuse to permit mere questions to interrupt their ceaseless flow.

Of course the BBC and IBA must respond to accusations of bias. But the argument isn't really about "balance" (has the government ever complained about right-wing bias?). The accusations against "Death on the Rock", *Panorama*, and *Today* are all part of a strategy of censorship by harassment, pressure, inquiry, private briefings, public abuse.

After one post-Windlesham TV discussion, the right-wing Conservative MP, Ivor Stanbrook, turned to Roger Bolton and said: "Well, Thames won't do that again quickly." And indeed who wants to do "Death on the Rock" while the government is contemplating its franchise auctions? It's about as likely as a Christmas panto performed by turkeys.

Browned off

Those who sup with the devil, someone ought to tell the Girl Guides Association, should use a long spoon. When *EastEnders* approached the association for help with episodes dealing with the Brownies, a senior Guider was assigned to the programme, in the hope of getting useful publicity. But the scriptwriters then portrayed the Brownies as marauding lager-louts. This week the BBC was reprimanded by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

Beware of the Guides' unworldly expressions of bewildered pain. Baden-Powell's movement has proved remarkably durable precisely *because* it glides along in the slipstream of the 20th century. Last year, for example, the Scouting Association decided to scrap the cub cap after a "peer-group attitudinal survey" showed that it was putting off potential recruits. Traditional bob-a-jobbing has almost disappeared because of child sex abuse; instead, the movement has cashed in on its clean-living image by getting its activities sponsored by Johnson Wax and Reckitt and Coleman. Last autumn the cubs went into partnership with Kimberly-Clark to promote Kleenex "Velvet" lavatory paper. The company sent out 600,000 free samples. According to Kimberly-Clark's head of promotion: "A mother or auntie is more likely to try it out than if something had been pushed through the door." The scouts have also done deals with Reebok shoes, the Tea Council, the Meat Promotion Executive and Unipart. Unworldly?

The idea of cubs promoting toilet roll ("Velvet Kleenex. Cubs wipe their bottoms on it") is admittedly unnerving. But even Baden-Powell thought scouts should should be entrepreneurs. *Scouting for Boys* suggested they should repair and re-cover old furniture, breed canaries, chickens and rabbits, and keep bees. He was also a skilled media manipulator: the "siege of Mafeking" was mostly a PR stunt. He would have run rings round BBC researchers.

Bordering on fantasy

Helmut Kohl's great political strength is that he's a perfect incarnation of the stereotypical German *Kleinbürger*. Conservative voters in West Germany see in him their own image: solid, conventional and none too bright.

But the solid burger has been acting alarmingly out of character. Intoxicated by the heady air of prospective unification, he seems to have visions of himself as a second Bismarck. It is a role for which Herr Kohl has the stomach, but few of the other attributes. His hastily dropped demand that Germany's eastern border with Poland "lie on the table" as a negotiable question in the run-up to unification was the worst example yet of this absurd fixation. Warnings by the Social Democrats, his FDP coalition partners, his newly formed East German sister party, and, most ominously, Gorbachev, have forced him to backtrack. It's hard to see what, rationally, he hoped to gain, except appealing to voters on the far right. And if there are enough of those to let Kohl win elections on a revanchist platform, then the rest of us have every reason to fear and oppose unification.

Despite the climbdown, the demands are likely to recur. In themselves they're not unreasonable. The ethnic German minorities in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere have certainly had a rough deal since 1945. They deserve more international sympathy than they've had. But the fears aroused by any hint at revision of boundaries are simply too intense to be played with. They could destroy all prospects of smoothly integrating the two Germanies. That would be a disaster: without rapid integration East Germany will collapse altogether. But Germany's neighbours might come to see that as the lesser evil. They might yet even regret that the Wall ever came down.

In deep shit

In 1988, the *NSS* claimed that Britain would still be dumping industrial waste into the North Sea in 1990—and was immediately bad-mouthed by government officials who said we were talking "absolute rubbish". How surprising, then, that agriculture minister John Gummer admitted last month that this waste would continue to be dumped at sea until the end of 1992—and beyond then where "it might not be technically feasible to meet this deadline".

Industrial waste was not directly on the agenda at the International Protection of the North Sea conference at the Hague earlier this week. But a promise to stop dumping sewage sludge at sea was conspicious for its long phase-out period: three years longer than the other North Sea countries would like.

But Chris Patten is no stranger to the political hurly-burly: attack is always the best defence. The pollutants from continental rivers like the Rhine are far greater than our own, he says. But the Rhine collects waste from four countries before it disgorges its chemical cocktail into the North Sea. Britain has only itself to blame.

For sale: one 30 foot bronze statue of Lenin. Unwanted gift. Price $1 million ono, apply Bucharest city council. There must be a fair number of these monstrosities around in eastern Europe. How long before a western entrepreneur corners the market and opens a Stalinist theme park? In Albania, perhaps?

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LETTERS

Alright for some

Why does Vicky Hutchings have to spoil her article "Learning to love the milk float" (2 March) with the insidious myth about the "convenience of a vehicle always ready to take you where you wish to go"? Single individuals, with full-time chauffeurs, may find this so; ordinary mortals have to waste time driving themselves, or waiting for someone to drive them, to a car-park often a fair walk from the factory, shopping centre or entertainment hall they are visiting.

Yes, I am glad to see that more efforts are being made to develop electrically powered cars. But let us never delude ourselves that even these will be anything like as convenient, or as efficient, for city-dwellers as a properly organised system of low-fare, high-frequency, rail borne public transport.

PJ Walker
Chairman, Cleveland Group,
Transport 2000
Billingham
Cleveland

Sandinistan resistance

An honest discussion of the failings that contributed to the defeat at the polls of the first Sandinista revolution could do much to help prepare the second revolution. Unfortunately your editorial (2 March) shows little understanding of the real problems and an obsession with trivial ones.

According to your editorial, the only defects of the revolution were "evidence of its democratic failings" and inconsistency in political pluralism. It is as if Nicaragua were a village cricket team. Wartime restrictions on civil and political rights were not invented by the Sandinistas—witness the press censorship imposed in this country in both world wars and the refusal to hold general elections during either, unless you count July 1945. This is the "cradle of parliamentary government".

You praise the Sandinistas for supposedly accepting defeat gracefully. If anything their response is praiseworthy for the opposite reason, since Daniel Ortega says they will continue to govern from below. This seems appropriate, and very much in accord with the principle "do unto others what they've been doing unto you"—to paraphrase Tory leader Andrew Bonar Law's encouragement to the Ulster loyalist revolt in 1913. There are stronger things than parliamentary majorities. I can think of no resistance the Sandinistas may put up in which I shall not be prepared to support them.

Mike Webber
The Guidepost Hotel
Bicester Road
Aylesbury
Bucks

Odds on

It is no wonder the ordinary person has very little faith in his intellectual "betters" running the economy if Rupert Morris thinks £8 on an 11-8 winner brings you winnings of £19 (2 March) and not £11. He has included his stake money in his returns. By the way, most of us know 33-1 as "Sherwood Forest": All the Trees.

P Simm
Crosthwaite Avenue
Eastham
Merseyside

A religious matter

Whatever the role played by social and racial issues in the Rushdie affair, the leaders of the muslim community in this country present the affair as a religious matter. There is, therefore, something unpleasantly patronising in your contributors' seeming refusal to address it as such ("Novel metropolis" and "Prophet motive", 16 February 1990).

Muslims, whether immigrant or born here are not "exotics", whose self-proclaimed religious directed behaviour can be dismissed simply as part of their cultural baggage.

Muslims do not see the truths expressed in Islam as limited by ethnic, political or geographical boundaries, any more than christians see the truths expressed in Chrisitanity as so limited. Until the religous arguments are addressed, the problem created by the fatwa can never be resolved. Muslim leaders do not wish to discuss the matter as a literary or social issue, indeed they do not see it as such. What is the point in insisting that the debate be restricted to those aspects of the matter?

Rushdie is deemed to have insulted Islam because his criticism of the effects of faith are based on islamic scripture and myths. How could he be expected to use the background of another faith, seeing that he was born into and brought up in a muslim environment? The issues he deals with such as revelation, the relationship between sex and religion, founder wordship, the persistent belief of the simple devout in miracles, possession by malign and benign spirits are only incidentally muslim specific. Why pretend otherwise? He could have written a similar novel based on the christian scriptures and myths, but given his background he apparently made a more logical choice.

Does insulting a prophet undermine a religion? Is the widespread use of the names "Jesus" and "Christ" as swearwords responsible for the much trumpeted decline of christianity in the West? If such matters are the kernel of this problem then, in truth, for God's sake let them be discussed.

Maurice Vassie
Deighton
York

Poll tax myths

In his very interesting analysis of the issues surrounding the poll tax, "Serbonian bog" (23 February), Jolyon Jenkins suggests that the Tory Party has been seduced by the mythology of little old ladies living next door to families of strapping wage earners paying the same rates. Jolyon Jenkins has been seduced by the same mythology in suggesting that the little old ladies living next door to the strapping wage earners will continue to vote the same regardless of the injustice and anomalies which they see meted out to others.

Concerned little young ladies do not grow up to be unconcerned selfish little old ladies, but are capable of making up their own minds about important political issues. There are nine million people over retirement age. Don't write them off and patronise them—they are an important political force.

Liz Day
St Peter's Close
Maidstone
Kent

Times long ago

I was astounded to see my name crop up in Angela McRobbie's review ("The body brigade", 16 February) of a new feminist book, *What's left? Women in culture and the Labour Movement*, even more astounded to read what I was supposedly guilty of, all those years ago in 1966. I wouldn't dream, of course, of advocating a statute of limitation as such; surely delving so deep into the past is a bit pointless if you're not going to get things righter than this.

I never attacked "Juliet Mitchell's attempt to introduce gender into these discussions", ie, the debates which emerged round the setting up of the *New Left Review*. Neither Juliet nor I were involved in the debates round the setting up of *NLR* in 1960.

When I wrote a short comment on Juliet's article "Women: the Longest Revolution", published in the subsequent issue together with a reply from her, I was reacting—doubtless intemperately—against her Althusserian conceptual framework and what I took to be an excessive indulgence to "the family". In other words, far from hostility to the introduction of gender, what fired me was the belief that the article was ultimately not radical enough *in relation to the task of women's liberation*. The tone of my comment was, in retrospect, over-polemical, but Juliet was then a friend from university (we were both still in our twenties) and a political comrade, not the doyenne of British feminism she was later to become, so there was no *lese-majeste* involved.

Perhaps Angela McRobbie has, understandably, been confused by the extraordinary account given of

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these stirring events in the book she was reviewing, which I have now managed to get hold of, and which though entertaining is almost wholly inaccurate in its historical reconstruction, which rather invalidates its thesis about the male lefts refusal to "see" women and their production.

Quintin Hoare
Blenheim Crescent
London W11

A father replies

"That half the men who get divorced lose contact with their kids" makes Suzanne Moore wonder "how strong the paternal instinct really is" "Fathers in Waiting" (March 2).

We all speak out of different experiences. I hate to break it to you, Suzanne, but mothers empowered by rad-fem ideology can go for separation and divorce knowing that their chances of keeping the children are 99.9 per cent certain. For fathers who love their children, the fact that women can count on being able to remove the children if they no longer choose to stay with the man puts them in a position of extreme weakness.

My ex-wife and myself separated on the basis that we would live very close to each other and so continue to share parenting. In fact, she then moved three hours train journey away from the town where I had to stay to hold down the job that sustains her and the children as well as myself.

My "loss of contact with the kids" is something that has been done to me: it does not reflect any absence of "paternal instinct". I am the breadwinner for the entire family. My ex-wife's move across the country means that, in my case, it is the man who has "long ago stopped battling for anything like co-parenting."

As a divorced man, whose children have been geographically and emotionally removed from him, I have been deprived of any serious amounts of "quantity time". There are his-stories as well as her-stories, Suzanne, even though the *NSS* may not be the best place to try to get them heard.

Name and address supplied

THIS ENGLAND

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● Everyone attests to his kindness to people when they're down. He has been known to find jobs for out-of-work journalists and to "put in a word" for people here and there. On Christmas Day he takes a hot meal to his golf club caddy, Curly, who sleeps rough in the bunkers. —Profile of John Junor in the *Independent on Sunday* (M E Blowfield)

● Sir—Regional television in the Midlands is planning a series looking at "working earls".

I am looking for six earls or lords; peers with a Midlands connection who will illustrate the changing face of the aristocracy in the 1990s by living not just on the family money but with a hobby or "day job" or some other enterprise.—Letter in the *Daily Telegraph* (Derek Morgan)

● The idea of a flexible response is you don't actually blow the world up. You may blow it up—and that's what you rather hope the opposition thinks you will do. But you do it in a graduated, controlled way.—Field Marshall Sir Nigel Bagnall on Radio 4 (Valerie Flessati)

● Undercover police are well in attendance at most clubs. "They're easily recognised," said one club runner. "They're the ones getting into the police vans at the end of the night."—*New Musical Express* (Chris Davies)

● Pennington then snapped and attacked her. "I punched her in the face and smashed her head on the floor as I was strangling her," he told police. He thought he had killed her.

Rita was found unconscious on the floor with the famous red and yellow striped MCC tie wrapped tightly round her neck. She has now made a full reovery.

And yesterday she helped save her fiance from jail by telling an Old Bailey judge: "I have forgiven him. David is not a violent man."*Daily Express* (Jake Lakeman)

● "I've been photographing the royals full-time for 10 years now and we, the media, have quite a good relationship with them. Diana, for example, will say, 'Good Morning, Mr Gavin'."—Kent Gavin in the *Observer* (Nina Hibbin)

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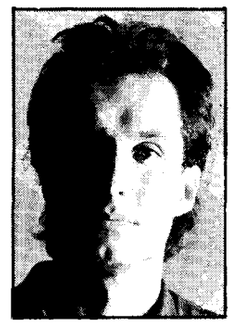
DIARY



Sean French

Last year I interviewed Julie Burchill for a magazine. She was nicer and funnier than I had anticipated but she was relentlessly negative about everyone she mentioned. I asked her to name some people she actually admired and after several minutes' thought she could come up with only two: Albert Goldman, because he had destroyed the sentimental myth of John Lennon, and Hanif Kureishi, because of his courage in publicly standing up for Salman Rushdie.

So I was surprised to read her attack on the left-wing intelligentsia, first published in *20/20* and reprinted in this week's *Sunday Times*, in which she singled out both Kureishi and Rushdie for particular punishment. Kureishi's fault was to have described the Britain of the eighties as an "authoritarian rathole" and to talk of a non-Thatcherite British tradition of "tolerance and decency". Rushdie was mocked for seeking the protection of the British authorities that he had previously criticised and he was excoriated as a destroyer of the English language: "When it comes to shameless mutilation of language, and the twisting of the truth, Rushdie is up there with the big league—Ceausescu, Kissinger and Khomeini." (This last is for referring to Mrs Thatcher as Mrs Torture in *The Satanic Verses*.)

But if Rushdie is as bad as that how could she have respected Kureishi for defending him, or criticised Moslem extremists for wishing to ban his book?

I remember Kingsley Amis once saying that being a minor character in an Evelyn Waugh novel is about as dangerous as being a leading character in a Graham Greene novel. Similarly, being someone Julie Burchill likes is as bad as being someone she hates. It just means she'll take a bit longer to get around to dealing with you.

Burchill is demonstrating what Stephen Potter (in his wonderful book, *Lifemanship*) called "damned-good-journalist play": "you must either praise to the heights, or blame to the depths. Whether praise or blame is chosen depends, if you are a damned-good-journalist, on your last week's article. You must never praise or blame two weeks running." There is nothing to be done but hope that Julie Burchill hasn't heard of you.

Burchill's argument, riddled with inaccuracies and ambiguities, was almost too sloppy to engage with. But the *Sunday Times* reprinted it because it slotted in with its running onslaught against the liberal intelligentsia, one of the few remaining minorities in Britain that remains fair game for general abuse. (It was ironical to see Burchill criticising Jeanette Winterson's attack on Cecil Parkinson. Burchill herself resigned from the *Sunday Times* when Andrew Neil refused to run her own analysis of Parkinson's adultery.)

Although the article had been written before the Nicaraguan elections, the *Sunday Times* standfirst stressed the connection. The Sandinistas' defeat, wrote a caption writer, "leaves Britain's 'dissidents' out in the cold."

I had no particular commitment to the Nicaraguan solidarity campaigns. I was sympathetic but I felt it got out of hand and was insufficiently critical of the Sandinistas' failings.

It's absurd, however, to talk of the vote by the Nicaraguans as a snub to the efforts of the British left. Both were, in part at least, pragmatic responses to the same problem—America's systematic subversion of the country. If I had been a Nicaraguan voting last week I would have decided that a Cuban-style siege economy was manifestly impossible as well as undesirable. Therefore the Americans had to be got back on our side and the only way to do that was to vote the Sandinistas out. No friends of Nicaragua should disapprove.

But why am I even bothering to argue this? Why am I consuming calories and wasting valuable seconds of my life by moving my fingers over this keyboard? It seems now to be a truth universally acknowledged, or at least by the government and those sections of the press that fawn at their heels, that just as everything good in the world, from eastern Europe to South Africa, is caused by Margaret Thatcher, so everything bad is a humiliation for Britain's trendy left.

Next week someone will doubtless blame Margaret Drabble and Antonia Fraser for the hurricanes and I'll end up writing a column about isobars in the North Atlantic.

Last weekend I went to yet another party to celebrate the wedding of an old university friend and while I was there I met another old acquaintance who told me that he was soon to marry the young lady standing beside him.

I have some vague memory that, according to strict etiquette, the right response to this anouncement is not to say congratulations, or at least one is meant to say it only to the man, or only to the woman. But even that must be worse than my immediate response which was to say, "Oh, how awful," which sounded like an unfortunate cross between Lady Bracknell and a football hooligan.

I couldn't believe that I'd actually said it, but then my behaviour has changed startlingly since I passed my 30th birthday last year. And a phobia about all rites of passage, from birth to the grave, has only been a part of it. I had anticipated that growing old would be a mellowing sort of process—wistful thoughts of mortality at the sight of falling leaves in autumn, but apart from that a gentle and contented maturation.

In fact I have suddenly developed a whole vein of neurotic pedantry, and my concerns have been more arithmetical than philosophical. I have begun making absurd calculations, such as that when Keats was my age he'd been dead for five years. More complicatedly, I habitually count back to some time of my life, such as the time I entered university, and then count back the same amount of time from there, reach the age of, say, six and then get depressed about it, though why this should be I can't quite say.

If I see a babe in arms I calculate gloomily that when it reaches my age I shall be sixty (if I live that long, which I increasingly doubt). On the other hand the sight of a frail eighty year old makes me imagine the hale fifty year old he was when I was born.

Also, in the most arbitrary and irregular fashion, I've started to eat things or not eat things in the expectation that this will make me live longer. A year or so ago I switched to decaffeinated coffee because the real stuff was making me feel like the wretched boy on the anti-heroin poster.

Now I've discovered that by doing so I have increased my chances of a heart attack by 15 per cent and reading the article itself increased it by at least another 10. But by how many per cent to I have to increase it before I actually get one?

ROGER WODDIS

Tears at No. 10

(Apologies to Cole Porter, and to Ella Fitzgerald giving concerts in London this week)

Peter Walker, the Welsh Secretary, who has resigned from the government, is the third minister to leave in six months

Every time they say goodbye
I die a little,
Every time they say goodbye
I wonder why a little,
Why the sods who leave me
Don't care, though once devout,
How much it will grieve me
If they all Peter out.

At the start, they seemed to share
My way of thinking;
Rats depart, when they're aware
The ship today is sinking.
There's no team that's stronger,
But I fear
It's clear
I won't last much longer,
Every time they say goodbye.

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Wednesday 28 March
Principal developments in 20th-century Scottish art focusing on key works

Wednesday 7 March and 4 April
Dualism in Scottish art – Realism v. Painterly Expressionism, Figuration v. Conceptualism

Wednesday 14 March and 11 April
Contemporary art in Scotland

Talks begin at 1.15pm and are free to admission ticket holders. Please assemble inside the gallery opposite the Bookshop.

Saturday Talks: 1.15pm

During March various contributors to both **Scottish Art since 1900** and **New Directions in Scottish Sculpture** will give illustrated talks about their work, referring to work in the show and slides of other pieces. Talks last about an hour and are free to admission ticket holders.

Saturday 10 March
Will Maclean

Saturday 17 March
Tracy MacKenna

Saturday 31 March
Alexander Moffat

All talks take place in the gallery.
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For details of the Programme please contact either **Anna Parker**, Education Officer, or **Christine Stewart**, Education Assistant on 01-638 4141 ext 306.

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Disappearing Habitats

Habitat, once the the leader in lifestyle marketing, is now unkindly called Habicrap. Carl Gardner chronicles the rise and fall of a child of the 1960s

Habitat, Sir Terence Conran's 1960s retail brainchild, received a heavy dose of "restructuring" last week—the current euphemism in the retail and design businesses for cutbacks and redundancies. Twelve of its 52 stores, making up 40 per cent of its sales space, are to close, in an attempt to stem estimated operating losses of £11 million this year.

On one level, Habitat is just the latest casualty of sky-high interest rates and the resulting downturn in consumer spending—after all, one third of British furniture sales are to first-time buyers. Other companies such as MFI and Lowndes Queensway have also turned in appalling figures in recent months. From about 20 per cent annual growth until about a year ago, furniture sales have seen year-on-year falls in sales in seven of the past nine months. It's ironic that in a society where the return to the hearth is increasingly touted, it's domestic furniture retailers which have suffered the heaviest economic flak.

But the decline of Habitat, once the epitome of British style, combining fun, function and colour with a whiff of cosmopolitan chic, has a special significance which goes beyond the immediate fallout of "the Lawson effect".

For those under 30 it must be very difficult to appreciate the impact that Habitat had on both retailing—and the way we lived—back in the 1960s and early 1970s. Habitat had a significance out of all proportion to its size—it never chalked up more than two per cent of furniture sales in Britain. Along with soul-mates Biba and Mary Quant, Habitat's influence—if not its actual retail presence—blew down the dour, post-war high street like a breath of fresh air.

Terence Conran, a furniture designer frustrated by the way his products were being sold by others, opened his first Habitat in the capital in 1964. Almost by enthusiasm rather than intention, he accidentally stumbled on both a style and retailing strategy which chimed in with, and then began to *remake* the needs and wants of, a newly affluent post-war generation.

Conran arrived at that magic moment of transition from post-war scarcity to consumer abundance. In his own words, we moved from buying "need" products to "want" products. Their emotional and psychic qualities began to matter more than merely functional ones.

Doug Hamilton, of designer firm Wolff Olins Hamilton, remembers it well: "There was something very uplifting then about wooden kitchens and herbs from Provence... everyone had a waste-bin or an anglepoise or a chicken brick from Habitat." But what was important about Habitat was that it didn't just sell individual products—it sold entire ensembles of things for the home, an integrated mix of furniture, fabrics, floorcoverings, kitchen utensils and so on, all displayed in room settings.

This was the birth of "lifestyle" marketing, targeted at 20- to 30-year-old, mainly single, professionals who were flat-dwellers or recent house-buyers.

What Conran delivered was what young professionals wanted—a watered-down, acceptable version of modernism married to natural, unadorned materials such as timber, earthenware, rush matting, wool and basket weave. It was city style with rustic connotations. Habitat products were clean, simple and functional, contrasting with the fussy frills, patterns and ornaments of an older generation. This was furniture for people in a hurry, people on the move, who saw their lives as stripped-down, natural and uncluttered.

In the 1960s, Conran delivered what young professionals wanted—city style with rustic connotations

But they also wanted colour, fun and a degree of hedonism. Many of Conran's designs had a Mediterranean feel—based on French originals, reflecting Conran's long-standing love affair with Provence. For consumers just discovering the Med through the boom in package holidays, this hint of cosmopolitan style too was perfect.

It was a unique formula, from which other retailers learnt rapidly. It's no accident that most of the leading figures in retail design today originally worked for Conran Design in the 1960s and early 1970s. Yet if Habitat itself continually hit the headlines for its innovation and flair, it actually remained locked in a tiny, middle-class market ghetto. In 25 years it grew to only 52 stores. IKEA, the Scandanavian giant, whose furniture is beginning to enjoy a vogue in Britain, and which works on an enormous European scale, is evidence of what Habitat might have become.

As one former Habitat executive admits: "Habitat is the greatest missed opportunity in post-war British retailing". Conran could have transformed the taste and domestic style of the nation, but he didn't. Like Harold Wilson's "white heat of the technological revolution", with which the rise of Habitat coincided, the promise and the potential of this new modernity was only skin-deep. Doug Hamilton describes Conran as the "biggest thing in British design since William Morris". Even so, his impact is arguably less than that of Morris—and Morris didn't have the might of marketing and City investment behind him.

Part of the problem has its roots in Conran's almost Victorian missionary zeal. He saw his commercial venture almost as a proselytising project, bringing "good design" (which to him meant self-evident, middle-class, metropolitan taste) to an unenlightened multitude.

The trouble was that the genuinely upwardly mobile, those with dramatically increasing spending power, learnt too well. Once "enlightened" by early exposure to Habitat they moved on to better, more expensive, more distinctive things—for them Habitat became rapidly passé. Meanwhile, Conran found himself left with the newer generations of less affluent, lower middle-class and aspirational working-class buyers. "Yuppie-ish, but not wealthy yuppie-ish", was how someone tellingly described the typical Habitat customer. Certainly the full-blown yuppie, the retailers' dream customer in the 1980s, wouldn't have been seen dead in Habitat.

According to Doug Hamilton: "The danger signal happened a few years ago, when people started denying they'd ever been there... Habitat products could be instantly recognised and people didn't want it known they'd bought stuff there."

The process was exacerbated by Conran's obsessive faith in "good design" as the panacea for everything. But poor management led to bad sourcing and lack of quality control—at the same time prices rose. "Habicrap" and "Shabbitat" were epithets that stuck. Chronic stock control problems also led to delays in delivery—Habitat put the waiting back into wanting.

There were other bad decisions too. Conran's aspirational, upwardly mobile customer was also by the late 1970s inevitably a car-owner. Yet Habitat stuck doggedly to its over-

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The Old Regime
ALL LIGHT AND NATURAL IN MY TASTEFUL HABITAT HOME!
S T Y L E
I LOVE MID-CENTURY MODERN!
HABITAT LOOKS SO OLD AND BORING!!
The New Regime
Chic Pix Studios

crowded city centre sites, with poor car access. Already many other retailers of bulky goods, such as electrical appliances, carpets and DIY had started to move out to retail parks and out-of-town sites, with both extensive display space and ample car-parking.

When Habitat did belatedly take the out-of-town plunge in 1986-7 it was too late—and many of the sites chosen were, in the words of one commentator, "dogs". For example, there's the two-year old, almost permanently deserted, Habitat store on the A40 Western Avenue, Acton, now due for closure. There, London-bound customers have to negotiate a mile-long diversion and three sets of traffic-lights, *each way*. Nice one, Terence.

By the early 1980s, in the first flush of the Thatcherite revolution, the relative paucity of Conran's achievement was plain to see. Yet it was just at that time, under the influence of Dutch merchant banker and personal advisor, Roger Seelig, that Conran became convinced that he was indeed a retailing genius and could "Conran-ise" the world. Habitat went public and Conran embarked on a five-year acquisitions spree, bringing Mothercare, Richard Shops, Heals and finally BHS into the highly unstable Storehouse Group.

By now, big City money, looking for quick returns from the much-hyped 1980s "retail revolution", was in command. Conran himself admitted the destructive pressure of investor expectations in an interview last October: "The power of the City and... the investors is such that they wind people up and try to make them do more than they should... I have to some extent fallen into that trap... you try too hard to do things too quickly."

The danger signal came when people started denying that they had ever been to Habitat

When quick gains failed to materialise, and Lawson's one-club attack on inflation started, Storehouse's share-price plummeted. Habitat in particular was ground between two stones—the first-time buyers didn't have any money, and the next biggest group of furniture-buyers, the 40-year-old-plus "empty nesters", no longer saw the store as fashionable enough. Conran himself ("the man who promised too much" in the words of *Business* magazine) was virtually sidelined, as the board brought in Michael Julien to rescue the group's fortunes.

But the worm in the bud lies deeper than all this. The eclipse of Habitat, in common with the resounding crash of Next, signals a profound shift in retail and consumer culture, away from the two-decade-old strategy of "lifestyle" marketing.

Demographic change, leading to a decline in younger consumers and the growth of the "new middle aged" and "new elderly", is one reason. Older consumers are more confident of their own identities and less prey to the glib offers of "lifestyle" retailing, whether it's Conran's integrated domestic vision or Next's fully co-ordinated fashion uniform.

Tomorrow's more mature customer, educated by two decades of consumerism, will choose products from many sources in a much more individual manner. The growth of "car boot sales" and antique shops (the consumer equivalent of re-cycling) are just manifestations of a desire to escape the tyranny of manufactured lifestyle, to rediscover distinctive products outside the commercial arena.

Meanwhile, it's ironic that Sir Terence has now almost retired to run the Conran Foundation and the Design Museum—another recruit to Britain's fast-growing "heritage industry". Perhaps it's Habitat, or what's left of it, that is today's best living museum of two decades of British retailing. ●

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Cracking up

John Osmond asks if the drive for a Scottish parliament is leading to a federal UK

Surveying the wreckage of the last Labour government's devolution bill back in 1979, Tam Dalyell asked the then Prime Minister Jim Callaghan if he could ever envisage the issue coming back on the agenda. "If it ever did, Tam, I'd want a majority of at least 200 MPs, and you wouldn't be one of them," came the reply.

Devolution was then merely a device to keep Labour's tenuous majority alive at Westminster. Now, however, the issue of devolution with assemblies for Scotland, Wales and as many as ten English regions, is back on Labour's agenda. But if Neil Kinnock achieves a majority at Westminster at the next election, it certainly won't be by 200 seats and the chances are that Tam Dalyell will be sitting behind him, and possibly raising his celebrated "West Lothian Question" once more?

This was the question, named after his constituency, which did as much as anything else to scuttle devolution in the 1970s. It went something like this: if there's a separate parliament legislating for Scotland, why should Scottish MPs at Westminster be able to vote on English business when English MPs wouldn't be able to vote on Scottish business?

Labour fears the most obvious answer which is simply to reduce the number of Scottish MPs—by definition, largely Labour MPs—sitting at Westminster. The prospect of this was raised during the Welsh Labour local government conference in Swansea last month by the party's former research officer in Cardiff, Jon Vaughan Jones: "I think we'll win the next election and I think we'll probably set up a Scottish Asembly, but the Tories will win the election after. Instead of abolishing the Scottish Assembly, which they'd find very difficult, they'll reduce Scotland's Westminster MPs.

"Together with boundary changes in England that will probably scupper the chances of another Labour government and with it the prospects of a Welsh Assembly, this side of the millennium," he added.

But at the latest session of the cross-party Scottish Constitutional Convention, Isobel Lindsay, a prominent SNP member who has opted out of SNP politics to work for the Convention, produced another answer for Tam's riddle. When a Scottish Assembly was established, she said, the English regions should have a period of five to ten years to work on their own self-government rather than have schemes foisted upon them. For that period, all rights of representation for Scotland at Westminster should be preserved, and then reviewed in the light of developments throughout the UK, including Wales and Northern Ireland.

This might suit Labour. At a conference organised by the three northern Labour parties in Newcastle last month, Bryan Gould said: "Decentralisation is a process. It can start from day one of a Labour government, and should continue to inform the policy-making of every successive Labour government... The creation of an elected regional assembly will be a landmark on the road to decentralisation, but will be neither the first nor last step down that road."

Gould suggested that regional development agencies, investment banks and other regional infrastructure projects could all begin before legislation for elected assemblies was in place. And then, Gould said: "I suspect we will want to decentralise central decision-making in stages."

The problem for this weekend's Labour conference in Scotland is that the Scots are too far out in front. The Scottish Labour executive has already decided to recommend proportional representation for the Scottish Assembly—a divisive enough issue for Labour. But the Scottish Convention is also considering sovereignty, and who will have it in a devolved Scotland: Westminster or Edinburgh?

'The creation of an elected regional assembly will be a landmark on the road to decentralisation'

As Dennis Canavan, Labour MP for Falkirk West, told the Convention in January:

> The sovereignty of the Scottish people is inconsistent with the sovereignty of the United Kingdom parliament. When we signed the Claim of Right for Scotland we were in effect challenging the sovereignty of parliament. So if we were merely to hatch some scheme whereby the UK parliament was to have any kind of veto on the powers and exercise of the powers of the Scottish parliament, we would be denying the sovereignty of the people of Scotland and we would be falling into the trap of simply repeating the basic flaws of the 1978 Scotland Act.

Labour in Scotland is desperately attempting to square the growing acceptance of this view within the Convention, with the need to maintain at least the semblance of the inetegrity of the UK framework. But three key decisions have all been taken which place the party in Scotland firmly on a federalist path. First the executive decided to drop the word "Assembly" and to use "Parliament" instead.

Second, the executive agreed that the powers of the Scottish parliament should be constitutionally guaranteed, or "entrenched"—not just handed down from Westminster. Third, it was agreed that whatever Home Rule scheme emerged should be seen as a forerunner for regional government throughout Britian.

The nearest the issue has come to being addressed south of the border is in a paper produced for last month's conference in Newcastle. This radical document, entitled "The Case for Regional Government", presses its argument mainly in terms of achieving economic regeneration and a fairer distribution of resources within Britain. But it explicitly rejects a federal approach: "We are seeking a direct and accountable regional input into national decision-making. In particular, we are proposing the integration of national and regional economic planning both to avoid interregional competition, and to aid the development of the UK economy as a whole. The links between central and regional government, therefore, need to be strong."

This clash of perspectives has inspired the Scottish Convention to examine the Spanish experience. In the 1980s, Spain transformed itself from one of the most centralised states in Europe into a decentralised "quasi-federal" democracy of 17 autonomous communities.

Three elements of this transformation are relevant to the British experience: first, self-government was offered but was not imposed; second, each of the nations and regions was able, within specified limits, to choose the powers it wished to exercise and the speed with which it moved towards autonomy; and third, autonomy was not tied to a federal structure, although it was recognised that federalism might come about. But true federalism has not yet evolved in the Spanish constitution because the nations and regions have no representation in the upper house of the Spanish parliament.

The Scottish Convention has suggested that the British constitution might be transformed during the 1990s along similar lines: Westminster would move first on Scottish self-government by passing a "Scotland Act" that would be ratified by the Scottish people in a referendum. If successful, this would be followed by a "United Kingdom Act" which would transfer to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, a range of similar powers. But each nation and region would be entitled to decide for itself if it wished to be self-governing and choose its powers.

If decentralisation became sufficiently far advanced, Westminster (or a majority of regional governments) could be empowered by the United Kingdom Act to establish a constitutional conference to discuss, inter alia, progress towards a federal or quasi-federal union.

To English ears, all this might sound farfetched, even fanciful. In Scotland, it is already a very real question, one that has overtaken Tam Dalyell's West Lothian Question. The debate there is no longer betwen Unionists and Nationalists, but between constitutional nationalists and separatist nationalists. ●

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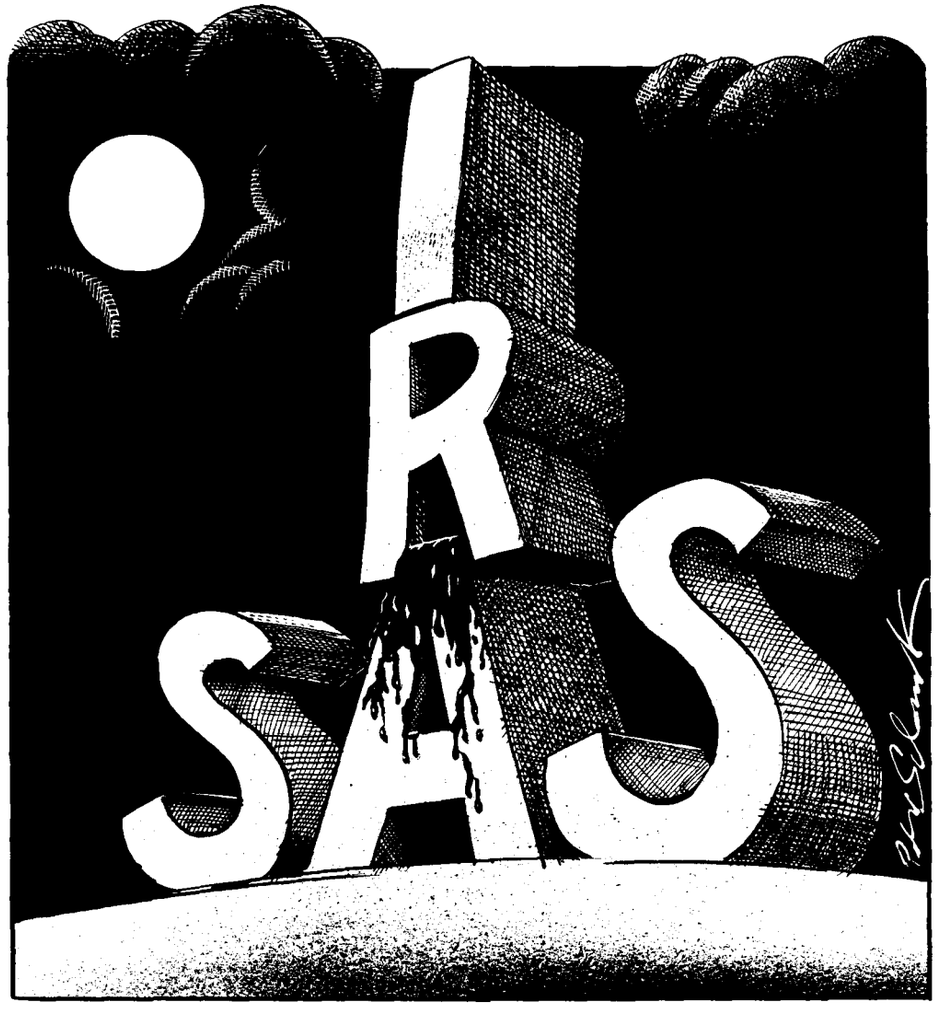
Signal failures

Two years ago this week SAS soldiers shot dead three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar. At the inquest into the killings, a central plank of the government case was that the three could have been about to detonate a bomb by remote control. Here Michael Scott, who gave evidence at the inquest, demonstrates conclusively that such a claim is technologically illiterate



Peter Schrank

On 1 May 1988 a story appeared in the *Sunday Times*, which said that the SAS believed that the IRA unit killed in Gibraltar had been carrying "sophisticated remote control devices" capable of detonating a bomb from Spain. The supposed radio-controlled devices operated on the 144 MHz band, an innovation that would allow the IRA to "operate over greater distances". The source for the story was "somebody in the military". The *Sunday Times* was wrong. Previously, the IRA had used 27 MHz equipment for remote-control bombs. Using 144 MHz *reduces* the range of operation.

Much later, when the inquest was in full swing, another story appeared in the *Sunday Times*, on 18 September. By this time the "sophisticated remote-control device" was revealed to be an ICOM IC-2E hand-held 144 MHz transceiver (or walkie-talkie)—a device popular with radio amateurs. While living in London I owned and used an ICOM IC-2E. The *Sunday Times* maintained that, since the instrument had once reportedly communicated over a distance of 600 km, its signal over a distance of 2 miles—"even though a built-up area"—would be "received loud and clear". This isn't true either.

It appeared initially that little time would be spent at the inquest studying technical evidence. A sworn submission was presented from a Mr Feraday, an experienced principal scientific officer at the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment. He had been asked to give an opinion on possible firing distances of radio-controlled IRA devices and the effects of intervening buildings.

"In considering this question with particular regard to Gibraltar I am mindful that I have neither visited Gibraltar nor been provided with any detailed scaled map of the area," Mr Feraday submitted. This did not, however, prevent him from giving an opinion. He admitted that such bombs were meant "only for line-of-sight operation. However, the actual operating range of any radio-controlled device may extend well beyond line-of-sight and in theory there is no limit to their operating range..."

But Mr Feraday then conceded that there were limits. He wrote that "any buildings between the target (receiver) and the terrorist (transmitter) will not only obscure the line-of-sight but are also likely to reduce the effective operating range of any radio-controlled linkage". Without detailed trials on the spot it would be impossible to guarantee whether a particular device would or would not work because of intervening buildings, he said. He concluded that it is impossible to state categorically that any radio linkage would or would not operate without full *in situ* trials". None was ever carried out.

On the basis of this evidence alone one could be forgiven for suspecting that when they died, the IRA trio were out of possible range of detonation of a remote-controlled car bomb.

Mr Feraday was called to give oral evidence. He produced an ICOM IC-2E, impressing everyone by its compactness, and by how easily it could be concealed. It was crucial to the Crown's case that the "button" should have this characteristic. In court he said more definitely

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that "bearing in mind all these effects it must be possible that a radio-controlled linkage of the type frequently used by the IRA could work from anywhere in this colony."

What were "these effects"? Mr Feraday, whose highest and only qualification is a higher national certificate in physics with electronics—though the lawyer for the soldiers insisted on referring to him as "professor"—had earlier plunged into the complex area of radio-wave propagation. In essence, he was describing the possible routes the radio waves can take to get from a transmitter to a receiver. There are three main ones: ground wave (or line-of-sight) propagation, ionospheric propagation, and tropospheric ducting. In the first, the waves travel at ground level. In last two methods, they head into space and are then bounced back to earth by reflective layers high in the atmosphere.

Mr Feraday told the court that ionospheric propagation was "the main means of propagation above about 30 MHz". Wrong, Mr Feraday: it is the main means of propagation at frequencies *below* 30 MHz. But any "button" using a frequency less than 30 MHz would require a long, whip aerial, which would lack the crucial characteristic of concealability. He then mentioned tropospheric ducting, which does apply at frequencies above 30 MHz. But this occurs only in very rare weather conditions, when an anti-cyclone is declining fast.

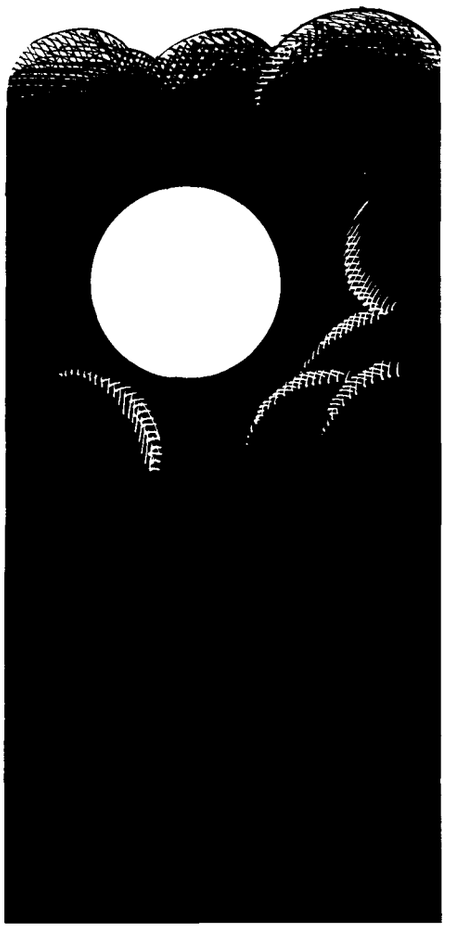
Moreover, ionospheric propagation and tropospheric propagation only work over distances of 100km or more, because the waves must strike the atmospheric layers at quite a shallow angle. This means that the *only* means of propagation consistent with a concealable transmitter and an unremarkable receiving aerial is thus ground-wave propagation. Mr Feraday's other "effects" were irrelevant.

In cross-examination Mr Feraday was asked about the car aerial on the suspect car, a bent piece of wire 30 inches long. He was asked: "Would the signal given by [the ICOM] be able to be received by that aerial on the car?" He replied: "It would certainly be received by it but its efficiency would be fairly poor in the sense that it is not the correct length as far as this particular frequency is concerned... Other frequencies it may well match up to."

The optimal length of an aerial is a simple function of the frequency used: the higher the frequency the smaller the aerial, and vice versa. The aerial on the car, given its mounting and orientation, would not be optimal at *any* frequency. Designed more with the aerodynamics of the car in mind than for its reception capabilities, it would be expected to receive only strong signals from powerful radio stations.

One advantage for the Crown was that it did not have to be specific about the frequency used, no transmitter or receiver ever being present. But the contradictory frequency requirements of transmitter concealability (the higher the better) and maximum ground-wave range through a built-up area (the lower the better), effectively limited the choices to frequencies in the range of 70-200 MHz.

The site of the car was also relevant. It was positioned in a "square with high walls" in the words of Mr Hucker, lawyer for the soldiers—the worst possible position for the reception of weak radio signals. And the aerial was pointing in the direction of the petrol station 1,500 metres away where the three IRA members were shot—the worst possible direction from which to receive radio transmissions.



The "car bomb" could have been effectively defused by simply unscrewing the aerial or cutting it off

Nevertheless, when finally asked the crucial question, Mr Feraday did not falter.

> Could you rule out... if you were looking at a car with that aerial on and you knew that somebody was either a mile or some distance like that away, the possibility that that device would not detonate a car bomb of the type that we are talking about?
>
> Definitely not. I would have to assume that it would detonate it.

The problem is now quite well defined. Would it have been possible for a concealed hand-held transmitter, operating in the range of 70-200 MHz, to transmit a signal of sufficient strength by ground-wave propagation at a range of 1,500 metres, to detonate a bomb in a car equipped only with an ordinary car aerial? The answer depends crucially on the nature of the intervening terrain and the quality of signal needed to cause a detonation. Neither of these issues had been addressed by the inquest before I arrived.

My first action was to walk as straight as possible between the two points of interest, from the square where the car was parked to the petrol station near where the three IRA members were killed. Initially I was walking on level ground along narrow streets with tall buildings on every side. Then the ground started to rise gradually. After 15 minutes I was faced with the impressive barrier of the Moroccan quarter. Beyond that were the old city walls, some 40 feet thick. The descent was then rapid down to the petrol station. The route was very heavily built up all the way.

From this it was clear that the ground-wave signal would have had to have negotiated a 100-metre hill, through a densely built-up area, over a range of 1,500 metres leading into an enclosed square. The terrain could hardly have been worse.

What quality of signal is required to detonate a remote-control bomb? From exhibits I had seen as part of the evidence presented at my previous court appearance I was aware that the IRA used a tone encoder/decoder system. Basically the encoder is attached to the transmitter and emits a tone at a particular frequency. It is this signal which is transmitted. The receiver/decoder, when it is sure that it has heard this whistle, detonates the bomb. The idea is to prevent random signals and noise causing a premature detonation—the decoder insists on a loud, clear, sustained and unambiguous signal before it will detonate the bomb. A signal of this type would be generated by an uninterrupted line-of-sight signal. A noisy tone would not satisfy the decoder.

I carried out some tests, using Mr Feraday's IC-2E and my own IC-2A, hand-held portable receivers. I used matched aerials at both ends—a system superior to any involving the car aerial. From the petrol station, marginal—noisy but audible—signals could be heard in the car park, probably due to the signal bouncing off the Rock. Even these signals disappeared, however, if the receiving aerial was tilted towards the petrol station (like the car aerial) or the transmitting aerial was held close to the body (as a concealed one would certainly have been).

I concluded that signals from a concealed transmitter would almost certainly not have registered on a receiver connected to the car aerial. Even if a signal had registered it would not have been of sufficient quality to cause a detonation. This I said in evidence.

That night, after I had given evidence—and left Gibraltar—Royal Signals Corps personnel were told to carry out the tests that had previously been assiduously avoided. They were careful, however, not to use the car aerial, in conjunction with a tone decoder, though they could have easily gained access to the latter. When Capt Edwards was asked to describe the task he had been given, he replied that it had been "to establish whether or not voice communications were possible on an ICOM-type radio" between the garage and the square.

Essentially, they repeated my tests—to the extent of using a photocopy of my map. Confusion was caused by using different frequencies and a more powerful transmitter (which would

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have required a bulkier battery pack). A cleverly misleading elaboration was to record a tone on a tape recorder and transmit it by holding the tape recorder up to the transmitter.

The first tests, at 156 MHz, were a failure. No signal was received despite matched aerials being used. Finally, by using a slightly lower frequency, voice signals and the tone were picked up, again using matched aerials.

Capt Edwards was asked by a disbelieving (and technically competent) juror: Am I to understand that you did not perform any digital encoded message and [use] a decoded digital receiver at the other end?" He could only reply: "No. The only equipment I had available were the hand-held marine-band radios, and I went just for a voice test and the signal tone put down a voice audio frequency."

Mr Feraday was then recalled. He stoutly maintained that it was easier to transmit, receive and digitally decode a tone signal than it would be to transmit, receive and comprehend a noisy voice signal: "If one can establish speech transmission, then the bomb will work." I demur. So did a persistent juror who pressed Mr Feraday with some 48 questions on the quality-of-signal issue. (Gibraltar is a very radio-literate society, being a major communications centre.)

> So really am I right in saying that, unless you attach an encoder to the transceiver at the other end, you could not really perform a realistic test, only going by voice transmission?
>
> I think they are realistic tests in the sense that if voice communication is established the bomb will set off. I do not think there is any doubt about that...

But the juror persisted and Mr Feraday's confidence began to wilt.

> If someone tells you that he has done tests and identifies voice signal deterioration, that still makes you think that it would work?
>
> I think there is a possibility that it would work.

Later on he was asked to estimate the frequency for which the 30-inch car aerial would be the correct length. Mr Feraday hazarded a guess—30MHz? At that frequency the aerial would have needed to be over eight feet long.

So there it is. The three IRA members were shot dead because it was believed they were carrying "buttons" (which they weren't), which if pressed wouldn't have detonated a car bomb, which didn't exist anyway.

Two other points are relevant. First, the "car bomb" could have been effectively defused by simply unscrewing the aerial or cutting it off.

Second, to cause the required transmission from an ICOM IC-2E, the power must be switched on, the tone encoder must be switched on, the frequency must be set using three thumb switches, three other switches must be in the correct position and, finally, the "transmit" button must be depressed.

The instrument could have been deliberately set in advance to work on a single push of the "transmit" switch. But the "transmit" switch, which has no guard, could easily have been pushed by accidental contact—or by its holder being shot and falling to the ground. ●

This article first appeared in Fortnight, Northern Ireland's independent monthly review.

Mum's the word

This week, Duncan Campbell challenges the new Official Secrets Act—by talking to Mary X

Miss Mary "X" was employed by the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) for three years. Three days after the 1989 Official Secrets Act became law, I interviewed her about her intelligence work. She told me that, as a 22-year-old junior ATS (women's army) officer, she was posted to the top secret Special Communications Unit 3, where she plotted radio signals from continental Europe.

Special Communications Unit 3 (SCU-3), at Hanslope Hall, Bucks was then commanded by Colonel Ted Maltby. It lay at the centre of a web of listening and direction-finding stations spread across the British Isles from St Erith in Cornwall to Thurso in Caithness. The heart of SCU-3 was a map room where bearings were plotted on two giant displays.

Mary X passed the results to another secret base at Barnet, north London. There, teams of analysts including Hugh Trevor-Roper assessed and disseminated their results. Radio transmitter sites were usually located overseas, but if a newly found hostile transmitter was found in Britain, there was a "flap"; had an enemy agent set up operations?

Near Hanslope Hall was Whaddon Hall, SIS's own communications centre and emergency headquarters, known as Special Communications Unit 1. Staff from Whaddon and other secret bases were occasional visitors to Hanslope Hall. On 14 April 1943, one of the visitors was a rather important person, General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, deputy Chief of the Secret Service.

Two weeks later, General Marshall-Cornwall sent Miss X a typed document, via SIS intermediaries. The document bears the names of other members of the secret service who passed it on, or commented on its contents. It is, therefore, either "information" or a "document relating to security or intelligence" in Miss X's possession, the disclosure of which has been made illegal by the new Act. This is what the document says:

Meet our Megacycle Mary
Where the dipoles cluster tall
Blond and blue eyed as a fairy
(Though her timbre is Sauciehall)...
Would I knew the grid potential
Of our Mary's thermionic
Calculate by differential
Why her voice is supersonic
If her frequency reaction
Could but oscillate with mine
It would give much satisfaction
For she's SUPER heterodyne

"Perhaps the future Lady Marshall-Cornwall", penned one SIS wag. But had this flirtatious interchange between the deputy Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service and the young woman subaltern with a Scots accent blossomed further, you would not now be reading it. "Megacycle" Mary is my mother.

I first heard this poem many years ago. We have discussed these details of her wartime career many times. SIS's radio listening network has been described in many books. Yet now, with the new secrets law, such reminiscences—"Mummy, what did you do in the war?"—are branded criminal.

Where revelations by those knowledgeable of security and intelligence matters are concerned, there are no exemptions in the 1989 Official Secrets Act for defences of public interest, harmlessness, prior publication, family reminiscences, or even fiction. What the critics of the Act tend to forget is that most such defences did not exist under the old law. According to Clive Ponting's trial judge, there never was a defence of public interest in the old catch-all Section 2. Ponting was acquitted in the face of this very ruling. The government can have no certainty that, whatever the new law says, a new Ponting will not also be acquitted "perversely" by a jury who finds his action public-spirited.

The unfairness of the new law will restrain the government's hand in prosecuting harmless disclosures or those about which there is clear public concern. To take the most recent and obvious example, neither Colin Wallace nor those who know about his involvement with MI5 are going to stop talking about and investigating his case, 1989 Act or not.

There are important advantages to the new law. For example, the mere receipt or possession of official information or documents, which has long caused journalists extra difficulty and concern, is no longer an offence. The very activities for which I and *Time Out* reporter Crispin Aubrey were prosecuted in the 1977/78 ABC trial are no longer illegal. The "jigsaw puzzle offence"—of learning too much about government secrets from open sources— for which I once faced a 14-year espionage sentence, has not been made law. Yet James Callaghan, David Owen, Merlyn Rees and the first Thatcher government were all ready to put into law such an offence, custom-designed to criminalise much investigative journalism.

In the white paper prefacing the 1989 Act, the Home Office explained the deficiencies of Section 2 thus: "Because Section 2 goes so much wider than what is necessary to safeguard the public interest, its necessary role in inhibiting harmful disclosures is obscured." Nothing has changed. ●

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Poll axed

Forget the Tory shires. The poll tax will really hurt urban areas like Margaret Hodge's Islington, and may not finally harm Thatcher

Perhaps the most telling TV image of the last month was of two Tory-voting pensioners saying they could not pay poll-tax bills of £500 each for their caravan home and that they would face jail if necessary. After the dry run in Scotland, the government hoped things would be better in England and Wales. In fact, they have been worse, much worse. Why?

In the first year of the poll tax north of the border the government was generous in its grant payment to local government in the hope that this would lead to low poll tax figures and cushion the initial impact of the tax. But local authorities (mostly of course Labour-controlled) took advantage of the grant settlement to increase their spending by about 11 per cent rather than to cut their poll taxes. The government got the blame for the high poll tax figures.

When it came to England and Wales, the government hoped to pretend to be generous while restricting the grant it paid, and at the same time to contain the new tax and public expenditure. In practice this exercise has not been very convincing.

Ministers have claimed that the 1990-91 grant represents an 11 per cent increase, but the grant is related not to what councils actually spent in 1989-90, but to what the government wanted them to spend. The difference between the two is £1,600 million. The cabinet has also ignored the costs which its new legislation—the Education Reform Act, Care in the Community measures, and environmental duties—impose on local authorities. The Environment Secretary's projections also assume 4 per cent inflation, but his cabinet colleagues are agreeing more generous pay awards.

Under the rates, 50 per cent of council income came from central government. Now it provides 75 per cent in the form of grant and the new Unified Business Rate. So if the government gets its figures on local authority spending wrong, the cost of making up the deficit falls disproportionately on local people paying the poll tax. It is no longer possible, as it was with the rates, to share the cost between local business and local people.

Tory-controlled county councils have been especially badly hit by the government's unrealistic calculations, for they used any balances they had last year to keep their rates low before the county council elections. That is why Surrey has been forced to levy a poll tax £85 above the government guidelines and Berkshire a hefty £100 over—creating unlikely poll tax rebels in places like Windsor and Maidenhead.

The new national business rate has further compounded the difficulties for the government. In many inner urban areas the burden of taxation has shifted from the business taxpayer to the poll taxpayer. For example, inner London business ratepayers will contribute £2,331 million to the national pool under the Unified Business Rate, but only 21 per cent of that will be retained for the benefit of inner London poll taxpayers. The rest is being distributed nationally.

In my borough, Islington, the cost to poll taxpayers of the lost income from the commercial and industrial sector at the end of the five-year transitional period, is nearly £300 each.

The essential unfairness of the new regime is worsened by gerrymandering to protect certain

The unfair poll tax is made worse by gerrymandering to protect Tory councils like Wandsworth

favoured councils. The safety net is so organised that Tory Wandsworth will receive £170 per poll taxpayer, while residents in Hackney, Islington, Camden and Brent—all authorities which have a high need to spend are all paying *into* the safety net. The poll taxpayers of Islington will be subsiding the poll taxpayers of Wandsworth by £42 per head.

There are other anomalies. The government grant to Conservative Westminster was based on contributions from London boroughs for flood protection which for Westminster was £7 million. Next year they will pay only £70,000. This is worth £45 to every Westminster poll taxpayer at the expense of poll taxpayers in other London boroughs. Similarly, the government assumed that Westminster would continue its subsidy to the English National Opera and the English National Ballet. In fact, it has cut the grants by £2 million to £200,000!

We do our best in Islington to improve the quality of services, and to make savings, but we are now in a position where less means much worse. Our housing programme, both new build and repair, was until recently one of the largest in the country, and it had to be. The government has now closed the loopholes that made it possible. Meanwhile, we can no longer subsidise council rents to make sure they are affordable for the majority of our tenants. (It was the prospect of rent rises, alongside high poll tax figures, that proved too much for the Tory councillors of West Oxfordshire.)

Mrs Thatcher is promising to publish a comparison of poll tax and rates figures, but it will be utterly flawed. To start with, it will ignore the additional costs incurred by local authorities. In Islington we will spend an extra £1 million on poll tax collection. And while we managed to collect 99 per cent of our income from rates, we have had to budget for getting 95 per cent of the poll tax. This means that every poll taxpayer in Islington will have to pay an extra £30.

Last year the London boroughs were not responsible for education. Now they are—along with other new duties. Last year central government grant was calculated under a quite different scheme and there were no capital controls. All this makes a comparison between rates and poll tax utterly meaningless.

Earlier pretensions that the poll tax would do away with the need for central governemnt interference and the democratic choices of the local electors have now been abandoned. We now expect the government to "cap" poll tax levels. This will be a wholly cynical exercise. The government will examine all local authority expenditure returns, decide who it wants to cap and devise rules to get those authorities.

But they will still face enormous political problems with capping. First the process itself will cause chaos and delay and amended bills are unlikely to reach poll taxpayers before June, causing endless difficulties for them.

Second, if it chooses to cap Labour-controlled county councils, it will affect all the district councils below those councils. For instance, to get at Derbyshire county council, the government will cause financial havoc to the nine district councils in Derbyshire, which will all have to adjust their bills to reflect Derbyshire's capped precept. How, too, will they justify capping the London borough of Greenwich, whose poll tax is less than £400, while leaving alone Tory-controlled Windsor and Maidenhead with a poll tax of £486?

Having capped some of us this year, what strategy is open to the government next year? Patten obviously will want to throw additional grant at local government to keep poll tax figures down in the run-up to a general election. This too will be done in a way that fits Mrs Thatcher's political priorities. By placing the highest financial burdens on the poorest authorities in the cities, and thus on those people who need the services most, the government believes it can cajole the entire population into believing that public services are bad.

But even if people value these services, and accept the need for them, they may still prefer cuts in services to the financial burden of the poll tax. The poll tax can be unpopular, it can be blamed on the government, and it can yet still achieve its purpose. ●

Margaret Hodge is leader of Islington council

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STAND

Bogus leaders

Demagogues must not be allowed to hijack Britain's Muslims, says Aziz al-Azmeh

Just as Christian nationalists like Enoch Powell and Norman Tebbit invent historical continuities, so do the Islamist firebrands of Bradford and elsewhere. Simple-minded liberals, third-worldist intellectuals and self-serving Labour politicians are all united in their sympathy for the Islamist advocacy. This is less an advancement of understanding, as David Caute claims ("Prophet motive" *NSS*, 9 February, 1990), than political support for groups that are trying to foist their leadership upon the Muslims of Britain.

Most of these Muslims were, until recently, defined as Pakistanis, both by themselves and others. That they are now defined as Muslims is a victory for the motley crowd that claims to lead them. And what a motley crowd it is: one-time leftists of Asian origin that the Labour party, in its wisdom, was unable to come to terms with; mosque agitators, some with very dubious pasts in their countries of origin; recent converts to Islam, their minds crammed to capacity by a meagre repertoire of verses from the Koran and without the slightest sense of Islamic history or of Islamic realities; young mullahs with little to distinguish them from the recent converts, except for their colour and their connections with Pakistani or Iranian political interests; other mullahs with a venal interest in religion; not to speak of genuine, normally elderly, Asian social conservatives troubled by disorientated youth and susceptible to fundamentalist propaganda.

The stock-in-trade of this august assembly is political Islamism, an extraterritorial claim to purity from the corruptions of today's west. The assembly mirrors the white British political tendency represented by the National Front and cognate organisations. The similarities are very profound. Both are supremacist. Both profess a corporatist notion of social and cultural identity, in which difference is total and otherness is dealt with only by exclusion and its logical end, annihilation. In short, both tendencies are fascist. Islamist politics in Iran and Pakistan bear this out fully.

Yet we are called upon to understand and sympathise, even to support, these self-styled leaders. We are asked to take at face value their claims to represent "the Muslims"—which they manifestly do not. It is in this spirit that Keith Vaz speaks of (unspecified) principles as "inappropriate" to the Britain of the 1990s in a recent, serpentinely ingratiating article (*Guardian*, 14 February, 1990).

It is this selfsame spirit which infuses Caute's confused article. He laments that "Muslim opinion", supposedly uniform, has no foothold in the media. This tendency to view with sympathy the arguments of the loudest voices, may well be meant with the best of intentions in mind. Are the Pakistanis of Bradford not, after all, the victims of a particularly inhospitable country in an age of acute social tensions? The National Front is itself a pathological response to the economic and social conditions of Britain. That the Islamist advocacy results from the same conditions is not, in itself, reason enough to sympathise with it, any more than it is sufficient reason to "understand" the NF. The fact that some British left-wing liberals think otherwise is connected to racism.

The fascism of the Islamists, rather than being decried, is regarded as singularly appropriate for them

The fascism of the Islamists, rather than being decried, is regarded as singularly appropriate for them, reflecting their "culture". A vicious circle is created: people with this attitude, especially those in the Labour Party, pander to the Islamist demagogues, who in their turn pander to such stereotypes. They do their best to parody notions of themselves as puritanical, violent and irrational, down to the most bizarre details of dress and bearing.

Thus the spectacle is substituted for reality, and David Caute, for one, is happy to believe in it. This exclusivist utopia is supported by Labour politicians, left liberals, as well as ordinary white folk in Dewsbury, who would be very happy living under a regime of separate existence and very separate development.

In this way liberalism is prepared to allow these leaders to incorporate their newly-constructed community into British politics. Having shed any faith in enlightenment—so profoundly inscribed in classical Liberalism—they substitute the demagogue for the intellectual, and the vote broker for the politician. At the heart of this is an avid embrace of cultural relativism, an embrace that ignores the dire consequences for the immigrant communities of the Islamists' fascist position.

Ultimately, neither the Labour Party nor the communalist Muslims are going to be around to fend off racist attacks, arsonists, deprivation, or the lack of opportunity which makes young men angry and older divines despair. They will proclaim multi-culturalism to the voiceless, especially defenceless women: they will provide the circus without providing the bread.

Keith Vaz and others are offering gifts to demagogic elements in search of a community. In order to be led this putative Muslim community has to be turned around by segregated education, obscurantist religiosity, social retrogression. There is no other reason for these Muslim leaders to pursue entirely impractical demands (withdrawal of *The Satanic Verses*, compensation and so forth) except for the desire to keep alive the ugly sentiments on which they depend for their leadership.

Some are prepared to be inflammatory to such an extent as to precipitate a crisis in public order — and quite openly. Vaz is sympathetic to the public order argument, and they can only take heart from this.

For his part, David Caute speaks for "the claims of religious sensibility". Does he view with favour the extension of blasphemy laws? And if so, would he not be misleading those with whom he professes sympathy by setting for them yet another unrealistic goal, another chimerical point for mobilisation under Islamo-fascist leadership? And should he not point out that the belief of Muslims that Jesus Christ was not crucified would certainly be regarded as blasphemous by many Christians?

Should he not, finally, feel it his responsiblity to remind those to whom he wants to give a voice, that their freedom to believe what may be offensive to others has to be matched by the freedom of others to say things that may be offensive to them. This is the prime condition for the survival of the democracy which, for all its faults, has placed Salman Rushdie, one of India's most gifted sons, under public protection. Caute's position, and similar ones, depend on a refusal to see that the Rushdie affair is primarily a political contrivance.

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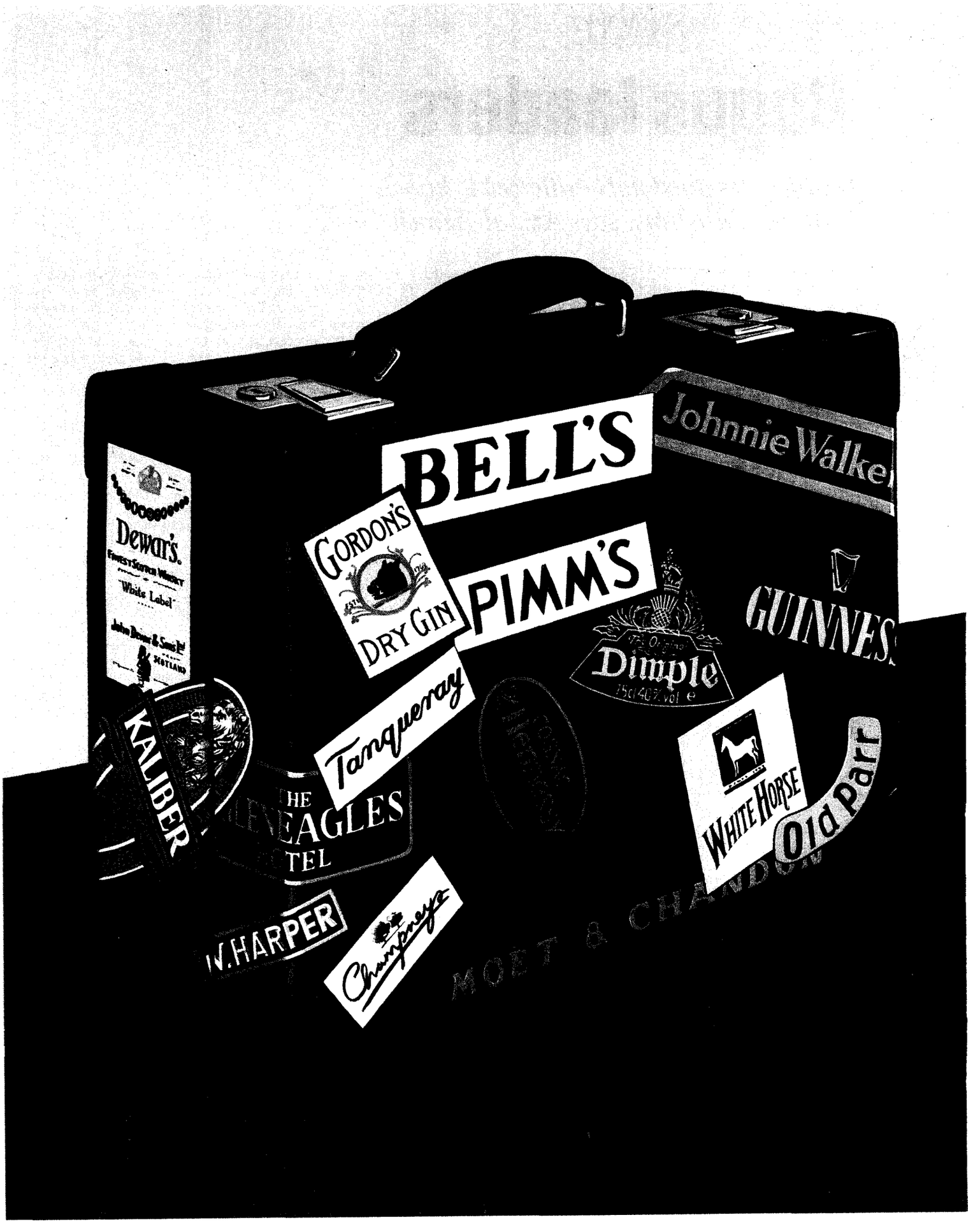

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Victory for violence

Eastern Europe has had it easy compared to South America. Alexander Cockburn denounces the deadly games the US has played with Nicaragua—and their effect on the election

There was no victory for democracy in Nicaragua last month. The victory was for violence and the lesson was that violence pays. After more than a decade of being bled dry by a powerful and relentless enemy—the United States—a majority of Nicaraguans chose realism over nationalism and said, "Enough".

It was appropriate that former president Jimmy Carter was in Managua as one of the chief foreign observers of the electoral process. He inaugurated the hostilities that were waged unceasingly upon the Nicaraguan revolution by US governments throughout the 1980s, and at the end was on hand to help broker the terms of surrender.

The Carter administration continued to support the Somoza dictatorship right to the last moment. Even as the dictator fell, the US government was still negotiating ardently for the survival of his national guard. When this stratagem failed, it transported the top guardsmen into exile aboard a DC-8 plane illegally protected with Red Cross markings. Carter thus saved the men who—under the tutelage of Argentinian torturers commissioned by the CIA—became the Contra commanders.

Today, these crude agents of US policy are left in the wings as the victors stride forth for their encores. Why mar triumph with tactless recollection of how it was achieved? Yet the Contra chieftain, Enrique Bermudez, should have been there beside Violeta Chamorro and Mr Carter.

On 30 August, 1989, in Jinotega, the Contras stopped a public-transport truck and captured an unarmed Sandinista union official. They broke his limbs, cut off his lips and tongue, gouged out his eyes and castrated him. The day after Christmas, in Estali, they kidnapped two poll watchers and three Sandinista activists. They shot and killed one, and cut the throats of three others. One had his stomach cut open and his intestines ripped out. On New Year's Day, Contras murdered Sisters Maureen Courtney and Teresa Rosales. In my view these Contras had been ordered to deliver to every draftee's mother the simple message: "Vote for the Sandinistas and this killing will go on for another ten years. Tomorrow it could be your son who is disembowelled."

The Contras inscribed this message on Nicaragua with knife and bullet, and George Bush drove the message home. At a November White House meeting between himself and Violeta Chamorro, the president said that the US embargo would most certainly be lifted in the event of a Chamorro victory. Here, in counterpoint, was the message to every Nicaraguan mother: "Vote against the Sandinistas or watch your children starve."

How many times have we heard that "the Sandinistas ran Nicaragua's economy into the ground"? On the eve of the election, the Associated Press sent out to its subscribers some background information on Nicaragua containing the terse sentence, "Exports have declined sharply since 1979, when the Sandinistas seized power." Not a word of explanation. There was no suggestion that such a decline might have had something to do with the besieging of a tiny country by the mightiest power on earth: the imposition of an embargo in May 1985; and the blocking by Washington of all lending to Nicaragua by such institutions as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

"Bush's message to every mother was: 'Vote against the Sandinistas or see your children starve'

So an electorate went to the polls, clearly admonished that a vote for the Sandinistas meant the certainty of continued war and continued embargo; whereas a vote for Chamorro, the US client, meant the likelihood of economic relief and the suspension of Contra attacks. Was this, then, a victory for democracy?

Violence, and the threat of continued violence, duly reaped their usual reward. Listen to Esmerelda Pareda, interviewed by the *Boston Globe* in a small town southwest of Managua as she waited to vote: "I have lost a son and brother to the war. I have suffered enough. I am here to vote for peace."

Last week, the US Congress cheered Czech president Vaclav Havel as he held forth upon the motions of the human soul. In particular, he expounded upon the burden of his nation's post-war history, it "taught us to see the world in bipolar terms as two enormous forces—one a defender of freedom, the other a source of nightmares."

Now, it could be argued in Mr Havel's defence that this performance was tongue-in-cheek, a way of coaxing money from Congress for his country. How else can one explain Mr Havel's denial of one very elementary feature of post-war reality—that in contrast to the tyranny and violence imposed by the US upon Latin American nations, Soviet domination of eastern Europe was benign indeed.

Where is the carnage in eastern Europe, even including the terrible death toll in Hungary in 1956, to compare with the blood-lettings sponsored and condoned by the US in this hemisphere? Since 1980, in El Salvador, some 70,000 have been killed; Guatemala, some 100,000; Nicaragua, some 30,000.

Contrast the indiscriminate bombing of Salvadorean neighbourhoods and Salvadorean death squads murdering hundreds before Christmas, with the death toll from the Soviet invasion in 1968 (92 dead, according to the present Czech ambassador to the US), when the government of Alexander Dubcek was crushed. And this is just the start of the calculus. How many lives have been shortened or destroyed even as they began, ended by the hunger and disease endemic to systems sustained by US arms and money?

Rather than flatter his audience, would it not have been more productive for Mr Havel, in his evocation of bipolar rivalry, to have counted the price more frankly? As it was, he bolstered his audience in its own self-esteem, furnishing a fit overture to the paeans this week to "democratic renewal" in Nicaragua. The true lesson he could have offered is that moral awakening begins with the construction of history as something more than merely the propaganda of the victors. The lesson that reached its climax in Nicaragua last Sunday week was the same one taught by the US in Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in 1973: violence pays and the more brainwashed the polity, the more vociferously will people cry "freedom" and "democracy" even as the violence is being consummated.

For Washington the immediate task, plainly difficult, is the demobilising of the Nicaraguan army and its gradual replacement by an officer cadre subservient to Washington, presumably staffed by the Contra commanders saved by Carter just over a decade ago. At the level of verbal manoeuvre, President Bush has joined with Ortega and Chamorro in calling for the Contras to lay down their arms and to reintegrate themselves into Nicaraguan civil socie-

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Jenny Matthews/Network

Church people, labour organisers, teachers, nurses and actors like Ed Asner made their way south

ty. At the substantive level the US will plainly make sure that the Contras remain instruments of coercion and blackmail.

Indeed it is not impossible to envisage a scenario under which US physical intervention does finally take place, precisely over this issue of Nicaraguan army and security forces. Suppose that the Chamorro leadership was to appeal, on the Grenadian model, for an inter-American security force to "assist" in dispersing "terrorist" resistance to Nicaragua's new democratic order. How vigorously would the Nicaraguan army fight, or return to guerrilla struggle against the Chamorro government?

That is the worst-case scenario. A more subtle US approach, already being hinted at in right-wing circles, would be the conversion of Daniel Ortega from hate object to new respectability. He would become a man who has "learned to respect the democratic process" and who is ready for the role of loyal opposition and, a little way down the road, perhaps loyal leadership once more.

It will be hard for Chamorro to run much of a government with her ramshackle alliance. The Sandinistas did win—even under the appalling conditions evoked above—a solid 43 per cent. In the last two years they administered an austerity programme disciplined enough to gladden the heart of any IMF officer (without even the IMF credits that usually accompany such suffering). A couple of years of economic reconstruction and increasing rural violence could perhaps see Ortega return as part of a coalition for national salvation—somewhat in the role of Michael Manley after the Seaga years—chastened in the school of hard knocks and ready to recognise international realities for what they are.

The United States will make sure that the Contras remain instruments of coercion and blackmail

It was always hard for the US propaganda apparatus to demonise Ortega to quite the pariah status of an Arafat or a Gaddafi or a Noriega. Today he is getting admiring treatment in the press in the US as a gallant and gracious loser, and could therefore be easily eased into the Manley role.

Would the Sandinistas permit such a transition and indeed regression in their political role? The party plainly had drifted from its popular base. How else can one explain the stupefaction of the leaders and militants at the results? Was there a different path that the party could have taken? Could they have avoided a "demonstration election" under conditions in which any rational person would have said they were bound to lose—that is, ten years of fearsome siege culminating in the austerity programme of recent years? The Sandinistas certainly tried to finesse their revolution, but in today's world they probably had no other option.

For the North American solidarity movement the shock has been very great. For scores of thousands of people the Nicaraguan revolution has been the political anchor of their lives, in terms of political activity and spiritual sustenance. Some of the finest organisations in the US—Witness for Peace, for example—grew in response to the emergency. Thousands of teachers, church people, labour organisers, technical workers, nurses, doctors, have made their way south to Nicaragua and spent years organising material and moral support. They built a solidarity movement that became a substantial force on the domestic political front and, I am convinced, deterred the Reagan administration from invasion in the middle 80s. But it never managed to get removal of the trade embargo onto the US political agenda.

In the immediate aftermath of the vote the depression was immense. Time has brought its consolations. Suppose the Sandinistas had won? What now would be the options? Perhaps the Nicaraguan people—a sufficient number of them—were right in seeing that the terms of struggle had to be altered.

Such reflections may diminish, but do not banish, the sense of gloom. For the generations whose formative political experiences were the struggles against Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s, the motions of history are being most significantly spelled out in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. For the activists of the 1950s, the Cuban revolution holds great resonance.

The coalition that worked to try to sustain and defend Nicaragua's revolution came both from a younger generation but also from a very wide and often fairly "unpolitical" pool. To support Nicaragua's revolution did not necessarily require much more doctrinal commitment than the zeal to end infant malnutrition or adult illiteracy. There was always a fairly marked difference between the Nicaraguan and Salvadorean solidarity movements, precisely because the Salvadorean terrain demanded fiercer political choices.

So now this Nicaraguan movement will have to redefine itself. It will be supporting or contemplating the support of a movement in opposition and one which has yet to redefine its own political objectives beyond the simple slogans of "defending the revolution". Life for the "internationalists" in Nicaragua will get harder and no doubt they will be subjected to violence, as Chamorro's handlers try to shift the political idiom of the country.

So it has been a depressing time, particularly against the unremitting background noise of triumphalism in the mainstream press. People will have to redefine their hopes and question their illusions. And they must not forget that in the last decade the movement in the US, forged to sustain Nicaragua's revolution, has given hundreds of thousands of young Americans an education in the meaning of the word internationalism. It has splendidly evoked the idealism that is such an important, if insufficiently recognised, part of the American social and political landscape. ●

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USED CONDOMS, SYRINGES, SANITARY TOWELS...

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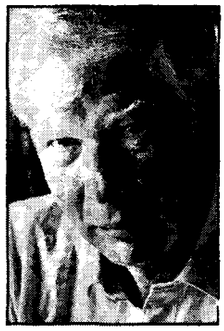
POLITICAL COLUMN

Tory wet dream

The Tories must dump Thatcher and forge new policies to win the election. Have they the guts?



R W Johnson

It is a strange experience to return, as I have recently done, from South Africa to Britain. In the short time I was in South Africa, the whole political agenda moved on ten years. Thanks to de Klerk's breathtaking boldness in going out to meet the future, South Africa is once again a young country.

You return to Britain, pick up a whole clutch of papers at Heathrow—high interest rates; inflation going up; dreadful trade deficit; government fiendishly unpopular; backbenchers panicky; tight budget expected. You look again at the newspaper dateline and realise that it could just as well be 1960, 1970, or 1980 as 1990: this is decidedly not a young country, you feel. When they talk about recycling newspapers here they mean literally just bringing out the old ones again. You read on. Suddenly, it says, people are looking again at Kinnock... not very bright... talks too much... but might make it after all... Labour party restored...

This article too has been written so many times now, you realise, that it virtually walks on its own legs. The rest of the papers are the same. No change there. Pictures of Princess Di, short-skirt blowing up, lots of leg showing. How can this young bimbo still be a young bimbo when she's been appearing in similar front-page poses for at least a hundred years now? No, it's just the whole country's in a time warp.

The time warp apart, there is also a definite whiff of *fin de règne* in the air. Thatcher sounds just as sclerotic, bad-tempered and defensive as P W Botha did in his latter days. Ministers—first Fowler, now Walker—have begun to bail out of her government citing purely private-life reasons, as if they think the train will smash into bumpers before long. Even Tebbit is harassing Maggie now. You overhear City chat about the Guinness case. All four of the accused are Jews, says the voice. How can this be happening in the traditional Tory heart of the beerage? Just like the cabinet, says another voice. Lawson, Young, both Jews, big financial mess left behind both of them.

It's all Maggie's fault, both voices say together. Just like the poll tax, say other voices. She's gone too far, says the chorus. Thousands of Chinese clamouring to get in and she's happy to let 'em come. These are the voices, one realises, of the tricoteuses as they engage in idle chat around the foot of the electoral guillotine. *Fin de règne*, all right.

The government is in such a colossal and self-made mess that the major political question of the day is simply whether they can get out of the spot they're in before the next election. One way of answering this is to accept the analogy of Maggie as P W Botha and to imagine the coming to power of a British, Tory de Klerk—someone determined to escape from the corner he's painted into and bold enough to seize the initiative and take the risks. What to do?

Start, of course, by sacking Parkinson, Ridley and, probably, Kenneth Baker as Party Chairman. You'll want your own man there and Baker is too unctuous and smooth—marks of the *ancien régime*. You bring in new faces, leaving Heseltine and Tebbit carefully to one side. Make a public and ostentatious peace with Edward Heath. At the Lord Mayor's banquet you give a generous speech about Europe and, binding the party wounds, about Heath's great European contribution, very much in your mind now you are planning British entry to the EMS and summits with Mitterrand and Kohl.

Thatcher sounds as bad-tempered and defensive as P W Botha did in his latter days

Returning by hovercraft to a press conference at Dover, you declare that the new European era enables you to announce both large defence cuts and the constitution of Anglo-French and Anglo-German brigades. The press, who love this sort of thing, begin to talk of a new SuperMac. The polls improve.

The 1990 budget—your first—is fiendishly tough with a 5p rise in the basic rate of income tax to 30p and steep rises in tax on liquor and tobacco. What grabs the eye, though, is a whole range of green measures—tax incentives for every kind for conservation, tough taxation of company cars, financial disincentives for using cars in cities, and so on. You leave John Major to take as much of the flak as possible, but announce yourself the cancellation of Parkinson's road-building programme and a massive push into public transport investment.

The income tax increase will eliminate the trade deficit and will allow a sharp drop in interest rates ere long. You pay lengthy tribute to Mrs Thatcher's wonderful housekeeping prudence, but also announce that reducing the national debt further is a lower priority than ensuring the budget surplus helps to rebuild the sewage system, and repair the buildings of the nation's schools, hospitals and museums.

All this leaves voters slightly shell-shocked but generates a sense of national direction. We must have, you announce, an end to drift. Our urgent task is to achieve equilibrium in our European trade balance: we must be "equals in Europe". This choice, you say, goes beyond disputes over capitalism or socialism and you will brook nothing that interferes with it. With any luck, the surge in public (especially railway) investment you have launched will now lead a union such as ASLEF to strike for a bigger share of the pie. You crush this strike with enormous firmness of purpose.

The 1991 budget cuts income tax back to 29p, but also graduates the poll tax to relate to income levels. The big reflation, however, lies in the steady fall in interest rates—let the EMS take the strain—and the permission you now give to councils to spend the proceeds from their council house sales. In an emotion-charged ceremony at the Cenotaph you finally bury the second world war, taking the salute with your specially invited guests, Mitterrand, Chancellor Lafontaine and Lech Walesa. In the gently rising recovery your poll ratings soar and in early 1992 you go to the country, with all your European partners visibly cheering you on...

Thus a Tory Wet dream. The interesting thing is that is not impossibly difficult to devise a winning Tory strategy, even starting from here. But the strategy above is not really available to Thatcher. Not only is she too crabbed, too set in her ways to change so much, but she would lose all credibility if she even tried. Only a new face could do that.

But will the Tories have the guts to make Maggie go—and then have the guts to choose a Tory de Klerk? It could happen. But look at the track record both of Tory notables and backbenchers—and think of Sir Anthony Meyer. It would be unwise, in a word, to bet on the Tories behaving as bravely or sensibly as Afrikaners.

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Ronald Grant Collection

Dying by numbers

Ben Thompson looks into the death business—and discovers there are fortunes to be made

Old people glancing up at the QTV (TV for people waiting in queues) screen, while waiting to pay in their pensions at Romford post office, are confronted not just by Saga holidays adverts but by the following advertisement. Beneath a series of questioning elderly faces come the captions: "Can I save enough?", "Will the family look after them?" and "Will it be a burden?". Then comes the answer: "Dignity in Destiny; pick up a leaflet now."

"Dignity in Destiny" might sound like one of the more bizarre slogans so beloved by bad-taste American funeral parlours, but in fact it is the very latest in British pre-payment funeral schemes, co-founded with Help The Aged. Nor is Dignity in Destiny the only option—Age Concern backs the larger and longer established "Chosen Heritage", which is at present growing at the rate of a thousand members a month. The advantages of "pay now, die later" schemes are numerous. First off they guarantee against inflation. While traditional insurance schemes often fall short of the full price when the time comes, pre-payment ensures a funeral at today's price whenever needed. The only way to lose money is by living forever. Perhaps more importantly, it allows people to make their own decisions about the ceremony they want.

Dignity in Destiny is all about choice. It offers a set of clearly defined alternatives (plain wood or best oak)—from the Wallis Plan, "a simple funeral carried out with dignity" for £585, to the regal Windsor, weighing in at a not inconsiderable £1,270—all couched in the comforting language of the Berni Inn. Chosen Heritage's plans—the Simplicity, the Traditional and the Heritage—have a more timeless ring to them, with the added incentive of a free gift (a Chosen Heritage Personal Organiser).

Funeral arrangements are a deep well of anxiety, as last year's Office of Fair Trading report into the funeral business demonstrates. While reported lapses such as confetti in the hearse thankfully occur in only a tiny minority of cases, the report found widespread worry about the cost of funerals, and small wonder. The death grant, fixed at £20 (then enough for a simple funeral) in 1949, had risen only to £30 by its abolition in 1987. The report's survey of 893 people who had arranged a funeral in March 1987 found an average bill of £586, representing an increase of 28 per cent over the rate of inflation since 1975. Those on income support or family credit can now claim from the social fund—the drawback is that if there's enough money in the estate, they have to pay it back later.

"The funeral industry is unique," concluded the OFT. "Because of their lack of knowledge and their distress, funeral arrangers are vulner-

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able and need...protection. This is not an industry where market forces alone can be be relied upon to ensure that consumers needs and wishes are fully and effectively satisfied."

Market forces have steadily wrought great changes in the world of funeral direction. Recent years have seen a marked decline in the fortunes of small undertakers—with high capital and labour costs there simply have not been enough funerals to go round—and their acquisition by larger more dynamic firms able to pool expensive facilities such as mortuaries, embalming centres and fleets of hearses. These chains often continue to operate under the old family names with the same staff.

The two largest are Hodgson Holdings PLC and Great Southern PLC, who are also the forces behind the new pre-payment schemes (Dignity in Destiny and Chosen Heritage respectively). Hodgson's growth has been the most spectacular. In 1986 they conducted some 5,600 funerals; in 1990 they expect to carry out 70,000, roughly 11 per cent of the total market. Last year they merged with rivals Kenyon Securities (who were 28 per cent owned by the enormous French company Pompes Funèbres Générales) to become Pompes Kenyon Hodgson International, Britain's second-largest undertakers after the Co-op.

Howard Osmond Paul Hodgson does not conform to the traditional stereotype of what an undertaker should be like. He bought up his father's deeply-in-debt Birmingham family firm for £14,000 fifteen years ago ("Once I'd ruled out the chance of playing cricket for England or soccer for Aston Villa it was the only thing to do") and is now a millionaire businessman and death's answer to Richard Branson. The *Sunday Times* placed him just under Michael Caine in their richest men league. Hodgson's oaktree emblem, the midnight-blue Volvos and chauffeurs in Portland grey are an attempt to establish the reassuring corporate atmosphere of a bank or building society ("The funeral business doesn't have to mean mauve curtains, a rip in the carpet and a little old man with an ulcerated nose saying 'do come in'.")

Not all the excitement generated by the Hodgson revolution has been of the best kind. Economies of scale can bring their own problems: one non-driving east-London vicar recalls being left at the crematorium and forced to cadge a lift off the mourners as a vehicle sped off to another appointment. "Because they're pushing in the maximum number of funerals a day it's the time rather than doing a satisfactory job that matters most; it's become a business like any other. The majority of smaller undertakers actually care and are sensitive—their occasional eccentricites are all a part of it; because Hodgsons are so big they lose that kind of personal touch..."

Howard Hodgson: trying to get rid of the anxiety that surrounds death

The passing on of such complaints brought instant promises of "no stone left unturned" investigations from Hodgson Holdings, who point to the client surveys, training commitments, proposals for extending the undertakers' code of practise and extensive refittings of decaying family concerns as evidence that it is they, not the old-fashioned smaller businesses, which provide the best and most accountable service. One Islington family undertaker summed up the alarm and resentment which has led to the formation of protective associations among some of the smaller firms. "It's ruining the trade. People go to the same firm their family has gone to for years and they don't realise that it's a different company trading under the old name... you have to sit and understand them—you're not selling them a packet of fags."

The balance of commerce and sensitivity is an intensely problematic one. Help The Aged believes that Dignity in Destiny's video advertising is a sensitive way of informing old people of the options open to them—"we wouldn't want anyone to be upset by the advert—they don't have to look at it". Doesn't the fact that the charity receives a commission of roughly 8 per cent on every Dignity in Destiny plan that's sold compromise it slightly? John Wheatley, secretary of Help The Aged and a non-executive director of Dignity in Destiny, said: "I don't think commission is wrong in itself; charities get their money in a broad spectrum of ways— from anonymous gifts, of which frankly there aren't many, to commercial sponsorship; it's a continuum."

Hodgson's latest ground-breaking venture is a Bereavement Support Service—eleven premium phone lines (a proportion of the profits go to Help The Aged) down which Harry Secombe offers advice on various aspects of bereavement. "Death is the enigma subject of the 20th century, just as sex was in the 19th," Howard Hodgson believes. "We want to get rid of some of the anxiety and fear that surrounds it." Just how far he'll go remains to be seen. By dressing death in the comforting rhetoric of choice and consumption, tomorrow's funeral director takes the pain out of the inevitable, and in the process he makes a killing.

The average funeral*

	£
coffin/casket	169
hearse	52
car following	53
removal of the deceased	35
care of the deceased	24
use of chapel of rest	12
bearers	25
attending to necessary arrangements	82
disbursement	162

*figures relate to 1987

Funeral Reports Office of Fair Trading, 1989

Knock knock. Who's there?

Just lay visitors checking up on the police. But does it work? Jolyon Jenkins investigates

"I must apologise for the circumstances in which we meet," said Mr Jack Lakeman, 39, extending a welcoming hand from which, I noticed, half a finger was missing. The unfortunate circumstances were that Mr Lakeman had been arrested for alleged assault and was being detained in a cell at Peckham police station, in the south London borough of Southwark. My two companions shook him by the hand and asked him whether he had any complaints about his treatment at the station. Had he had a hot breakfast? Had he spoken to a solicitor? Everything seemed to be in order: "The officers who have been dealing with me have all been very pleasant and polite."

My companions were two "lay visitors" —ordinary members of the public who can carry out spot checks on police stations and talk to detainees, at any time without notice. Most London boroughs now have lay visitors' schemes, and they are spreading fast outside the capital, particularly in the West Midlands, Liverpool and Manchester. The unwritten deal is that if a borough will participate in a consultative police group, it gets a lay visitors' scheme.

The first was set up six years ago in Lambeth, next door to Southwark, as an ad hoc agreement between local police and community groups. Lord Scarman, in his report into the Brixton riots, approved, and recommended more of them. He thought lay visitors should also be able to witness interrogation of suspects—but the police strongly resisted, and visitors are confined to custody areas.

Despite that limitation, Southwark has discovered some disturbing incidents during the 21 months in which its scheme has been operating. On one occasion, two lay visitors were kept waiting 20 minutes at reception, even though the station had only two detainees. During inspection of the cells, they found one locked and empty. The custody officer said that there was blood in the cell, waiting to be cleaned up:

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the detainee had "cut his hands". As the lay visitors left, an officer said to one: "Did you enjoy your little game?" (He immediately apologised.)

Another time, two visitors carried out a check at 1.35 am. They found a detainee who had just arrived at the station "covered in blood and handcuffed very tightly". According to its first annual report: "the frequency with which visitors have noted cell walls spattered with blood at Carter Street police station has been a cause for concern." My visit turned up nothing so dramatic, but it was untypical, because the police had to be given notice in order for me to come along. The lavatory in one cell was blocked and the bell-push in another was broken, but that was all we could find. It was particularly noticeable that of the 11 detainees, five were immigration service prisoners—Africans who had been held there since a raid on British Rail premises four days previously. The cells are not meant to hold people that long: there is no ventilation, and no washing facilities, and they had become unpleasantly stuffy. But the normal legal time limits on detention don't apply to immigration service prisoners, who make up an increasing proportion of police station detainees.

According to the annual report: "the frequency with which visitors have noted cell walls spattered with blood has been a cause for concern."

The ones we saw were suspicious and reticent. We spoke to a Mr Owusu, about to be deported back to Nigeria. He claimed that he hadn't been allowed to have his shaving mirror and that his uncle had not been allowed to visit him the previous day. "Apart from that they have been wonderful, I would say. I only hope..."—he glanced at the inspector escorting us—"...I have never in my life been in this situation. I don't want to talk too much."

The presence of the inspector had a noticeably inhibiting effect on detainees' willingness to complain, particularly if, as in the case of the immigration detainees, they were unsure about exactly who the lay visitors were. This became a source of conflict between police and visitors in Lambeth, and was one factor which led to the scheme breaking down completely for seven months in 1987. Another was an apparent police reluctance to cooperate with young black lay visitors. After the breakdown, a set of written guidelines was negotiated which allows a police officer to watch the visitors, but out of earshot.

According to Nicholas Long, chair of the Lambeth lay visitors' panel, the other crucial ingredient to a successful scheme is for the visitors to have instantaneous access to the cells. "We start asking very serious questions if we are kept waiting more than five minutes. But when I said this at a recent conference, there were gasps of astonishment from people in other schemes, who were used to waiting 30 minutes. Luckily we are almost at the point where we have direct access via the back door into all custody areas."

In some areas, says Mr Long, the police have realised that they should treat the lay visitors as allies who can give the stubborn Home Office bureaucracy a shove. The corollary is that the police have to learn to take criticism when it's justified—something which the Southwark police are only just getting used to. The lesson seems to be that lay visitors can be effective watchdogs, but that it may take several years for the necessary levels of trust and cooperation to emerge.

Ladies first!

Getting women back to work is what the government wants. But only on the cheap, says Maria Manning

The government's desire to do something about the now-famous "demographic time-bomb" has done more to highlight women's issues than 20 years of lobbying by the feminist movement. Official alarm about a shrinking workforce means that the Whitehall mind is now considering how best to get women into the job market, and as a result, childcare is making one of its rare appearances on the political agenda. Not since Ernest Bevin's "manpower budget" set out to mobilise women in the war economy have we seen such a concerted focus on the facilities needed to allow women to do paid work.

On the day that Hounslow Council and Save The Children jointly hosted a conference on "Childcare in the 90s", there was press speculation that the Chancellor would remove the tax on workplace nurseries. But Peter Moss, co-ordinator of the European Childcare Network, finds such reporting "deeply depressing". By concentrating on childcare issues from a narrow, labour-force perspective, he says, employers' interests can override all others. Women may gain only a very precarious right to work, since should the economy contract or the supply of young recruits again become plentiful, the workplace nursery could disappear overnight.

WELFARE WATCH

When I'm sixty-five

Readers might suppose that the Social Security Bill, which emerged unscathed from its committee stage last Thursday, was mainly concerned with knocking a few billion off the benefits budget in the next century. Not at all. Fourteen pages of the bill are about protecting the rights of members of occupational and personal pension schemes.

Schedule 2 of the bill provides for the appointment of an ombudsman to sort out disputes between pension scheme members and trustees. As well as the classic ombudsman function of investigating administrative cock-ups, he will be able to resolve legal disputes, and his decisions will be binding.

Despite doubts as to whether such powers should be entrusted to one person, rather than to a properly constituted tribunal, the ombuds man will provide a much needed service to people who think they are being conned and cannot afford the cost of legal action. But it will be important to ensure that his independence (a female ombudsman is possible but statistically unlikely) is not impaired by the fact that he is to be funded by a levy on the pensions "industry". The insurance companies' trade association has urged that the cost be kept to a minimum.

There will be many grievances the ombuds man cannot remedy because they result from events long past. A recent example quoted in the debate on the bill was that of a man who, on reaching pension age, found he was entitled to a pension of only 42 pence a week from the Prudential under a contracted-out employer's scheme he paid into for seven years in the 1960s. This turned out to be one of the many thousands set up by employers to avoid paying into the graduated pension scheme.

The GPS itself was started by a Tory government in 1961, but Barbara Castle stopped any further intake in 1975 as it offered no protection from inflation. Labour's 1975 pensions act provided full inflation-proofing for the graduated state pensions still being paid out. But nothing could be done about those contracted-out private pensions which have also been losing value since 1961 and have continued to do so. By now they are almost worthless.

Any solution to this problem would cost money and it is not clear who would pay, given that many of the employers concerned no longer exist. Eric Illsley, MP, suggested that the insurance companies might foot at least part of the bill.

More probably, these frozen pensions will remain a monument to the futility of pension schemes which do not face up to inflation. The lesson has not yet been learnt. A Labour amendment to the bill, requiring that all future occupational schemes provide inflation-proof pensions, was predictably defeated.

Tony Lynes

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A few years ago during union negotiations at Haymarket Publishing Group, the director turned down a request for a nursery. "There are only three women with children of an age to need it," he said. "But there are *lots* of male employees with children that age," replied the union. Long silence. "Do you mean to say," asked the director, "that employees' *wives'* children could use it?" It appeared the union did. The nursery was not forthcoming. Male employees have always had wives to stay home and look after the children. Only now that women are required for the workforce are nurseries being discussed.

This is not to deny that the abolition of the tax on workplace nurseries would be a positive move. But there is a broad consensus across campaign groups, voluntary organisations and childcare experts on the need for publicly funded, community-based facilities. The government, however, stubbornly insists that market forces will provide. In this climate Hounslow Borough Council, which has an exemplary record in the field, with 66 per cent of three and four year olds getting pre-primary schooling (the English average is 20 per cent), has joined with Save the Children to try to ensure that the borough gets high-quality, affordable childcare services.

Hounslow cannot afford to expand its own facilities, so its pragmatic response is to offer advice and expertise to private companies willing to provide them instead. The borough is promoting joint ventures while playing a co-ordinating role between parents, employers and voluntary groups within the community. The Daycare Trust, set up to promote quality childcare in Britain, is also moving along these lines: last December it launched its "Childcare Links" project aimed at providing information and support for local communities wishing to start up similar partnership schemes.

British childcare provision lags well behind the rest of Europe. In Denmark, for example, there is a high level of publicly funded childcare available, with parents paying between 25 and 30 per cent of costs, and central and local government paying the rest. Even in more patriachcal European countries, Peter Moss generally finds a more progressive approach towards children and family policies.

Money is the crucial issue in the current debate on childcare. The private market option is far too expensive for many families—a place in a private nursery in London costs £4,500 or more a year. Working for Childcare and the National Childcare Campaign both agree that individual tax relief against childcare expenses is not the answer, since it disproportionately benefits the middle and higher income earners, and many women in low-paid or part-time jobs derive no benefit at all. Current proposals to replace child benefit, frozen since 1987, with child tax allowances are rejected on similar grounds. The Child Poverty Action Group points out that half of married women in paid employment do not pay income tax, and almost half of mothers with children have no jobs. For these groups, increased child benefit and subsidised community-based childcare is the only real answer.

FRINGE BENEFITS

DESpots

Colin Ward

In the mid-seventies, the late John Vaizey (our foremost authority on the economics of education), in one of his provocative contributions to the education press, asked: "Do we really need the DES?" Exactly what function, he asked, has the department, when the local authorities themselves have inspectors and subject advisers, and when we have a theoretically decentralised education system?

Anyone with the slightest attachment to conspiratorial theories of politics would date from that moment a devious plot by the department to establish absolute control over schools, something it had failed to achieve ever since the Board of Education abandoned the "payment by results" system in the last century.

The present government has been putty in the hands of the department, but we deceive ourselves in blaming the demoralisation of the teaching industry solely on Mrs Thatcher. She received an early reputation in the Heath government as "Maggie Thatcher, Milk Snatcher", but it was the Wilson and Callaghan governments that set current trends in motion. They were manipulated into establishing the Assessment of Performance Unit and into implementing the so-called Yellow Paper of 1976, prepared by the DES to brief James Callaghan for his speech at Ruskin College.

The venue was chosen with a nice sense of irony: Ruskin was founded to provide a liberal education to working men. Although Callaghan said that he wanted to open a national debate on education, the guidelines had already been laid down by the civil servants. A week before his speech, in October 1976, the press had announced that "a multimillion pound emergency programme to monitor standards in primary and secondary schools has been started by the DES". This was at the time when schools were being obliged to make multimillion pound cuts in their own spending, in what has turned out to be the first of endless efforts to demand cost-effectiveness from schools.

At the same time, using exactly the same language as the Tories of the eighties, the then Welsh secretary, John Morris, gave "clear, uncompromising guidance", saying that "the priority must be tilted towards the engineer, the scientist and the mathematician... our children must be taught in the languages of Europe to such a degree of proficiency that they can sell and service our products in the countries of our trading partners..."

You can applaud or denigrate the attempt to blame the long-term decline of British industry on the school system. But you can't avoid the issue of galloping centralisation by shoving all the responsibility on to our current political bosses. All they deserve is our contempt for making sure that their own children are not subjected to the National Curriculum enforced on other people's by the DES.

I was at a meeting last month addressed by Peter Newsam, director of the Insitute of Education in London and former chief education officer of the ILEA. He remarked that five years ago we spent more on examing at sixteen-plus than on all the text books and library books bought to cover the entire secondary school years. By now, he stressed, that gap in priorities had been increased by enlargement at one end and contraction at the other.

That is only part of the story. The DES trump card of assessment means that by 1992 it will be assessing 2½ million children in ten subjects. The head of a science department explained to me some of the complexities this implies. In science, 17 attainment targets are to be tested at ten levels. Can you imagine the labour involved in all this? It is of course the labour of teachers and students, taken out of the time available for teaching and learning.

It represents the final triumph of the DES in taking over the classroom from the teacher. Newsam sees it as the introduction of "planned turmoil". A few years ago GCSE was introduced at breakneck speed. The aims of the National Curriculum if carried through will imply that GCSE is already obsolete. It was characterised by Peter Newsam as the application of formulae to education, the point being that formulae don't require the intervention of human intelligence. And he pointed out that, despite the sanctimonious genuflections of the government towards parent power, "right through the system, power has been removed from people *doing* things".

We are approaching a crisis in schooling provoked by the DES. Anyone with teaching experience knows that we have a battle against a profoundly anti-educational culture, and everyone with learning experience knows that the influence of a particular teacher was far more important than the subject on the timetable. It's such a pity that their self-respect is obliging those teachers to leave the job in droves. Who's going to pull us out of the crisis?

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Society Today is *NSS*'s term-time page for sociology students

Crystal balls

Pat McNeill looks at the direct and indirect effects of predicting the future

The twentieth edition of *Social Trends* was published in February and the occasion prompted its editor to make some forecasts about social and economic life in the UK for the next two decades.

By the year 2011, the population will be up to 60 million, compared to 57 million in 1988. Within this total, the number of 16 year olds will fall from its present 800,000 to about 650,000 in 1991, will rise again to about 840,000 in 2011 and then decline to some 720,000 in the early 2020s.

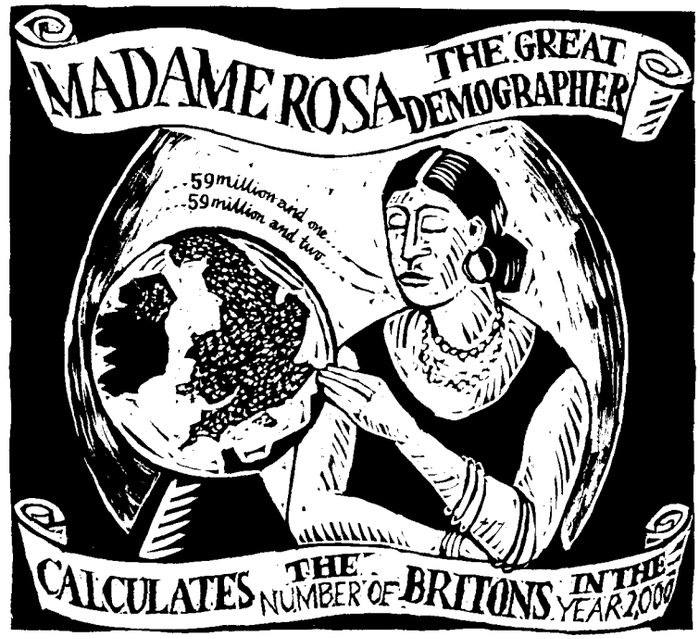
How are such forecasts made and how accurate are they?

The main point to recognise is that they are *projections*; that is, forecasts of the future which are based on current evidence and on the trends of the recent past. They are extrapolations of a trend or of a supposed trend. To make a projection of the population in 2010, for example, the demographer notes the size of the present population and its age and sex structure, and then considers recent trends in birth-rates, death-rates and migration. All these are matters of historical record.

At this point, the demographer has to start making assumptions about whether these rates will rise, stay constant, fall or fluctuate over the next 20 years. A projection is literally a "throwing forward", so the demographer throws current trends forward into the future. It is the assumptions that are made that determine the accuracy of the projection.

Tom Griffin, *Social Trends*' editor, is fully aware of this. He writes: "It should of course be borne in mind that projections do not have the accuracy of historical statistics. They are all subject to revision as new evidence emerges and new assumptions are made." At the very least they can be deliberately changed, as in China where a one child per family policy in the seventies meant a lower birth-rate.

In fact, population forecasts in the postwar period have often turned out to be wrong. In the mid-sixties, the high birth-rate prompted predictions of a population of 73 million for Great Britain by the year 2000. Unless something completely extraordinary happens to birth-rates, death-rates and immigration, there is now no way that that total will be reached. By 1983, the projection was down to 56 million. Now it is up again. Current population forecasts for Britain tend to assume that fertility will remain at or just below replacement level until the end of the century, whereas in many other European countries it is expected to be below that level.


MADAME ROSA THE GREAT DEMOGRAPHER
59 million and one...
59 million and two...
CALCULATES THE NUMBER OF BRITONS IN THE YEAR 2000

Judy Stevens

Discussion topic:

What are the main factors affecting the birth-rate?

Projections of the number of 16 year olds involve fewer assumptions. We know how many children there are of all ages up to fifteen, and the death-rates of this age group have been reasonably constant for some years. After allowing for a small amount of migration, it is possible then to forecast very accurately how many 16 year olds there will be in each of the next 15 years. After that, demographers are dependent on knowing how many women of child-bearing age there will be in the population in each year, and then making projections about how many babies they will have.

Griffin uses the projection of the number of births outside marriage to suggest the dangers of naive extrapolation. If the recent increase in the number of such births were maintained at the current rate, for example, it would result in all births being outside marriage in less than 20 years. Though this idea was seized upon by the media, it is not going to happen because there are too many other variables involved.

Can such projections be self-fulfilling, or even self-defeating, prophecies?

It seems unlikely that knowledge of projected birth-rates will directly affect anyone's personal decision about whether to have a child. But it could affect government policies which may encourage or discourage birth-rates.

An obvious example of this is that of road traffic. *Social Trends* projects that, for every hundred miles driven by all motor traffic in 1988, somewhere between 170 and 222 miles will be covered in 2020. Cecil Parkinson, the Transport Secretary, argues that to deal with the increase more roads must be built. But new roads may simply encourage more traffic, as in the notorious example of the M25.

But, however provisional the projections may be, the fact that we can make them at all is powerful evidence of the orderliness and predictability of human social behaviour. Activities like having babies, getting married, or committing crimes are, at one level, personal and individual. But they occur in patterns which are broadly predictable. It is this orderliness on which the discipline of sociology is based.

This is the fundamental insight that Durkheim offered in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) which enabled him to contribute to the establishment of modern sociology as a legitimate discipline. He called these regularities "social facts" and defined them as "ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a power of coercion by reason of which they control him". He gives the examples of moral regulations, religious faiths, language, and financial systems.

He also describes as facts "social currents", such as those that occur in crowd behaviour, and "currents of opinion" which, he says, "impel certain groups either to more marriages, for example, or to more suicides, or to a higher or lower birth-rate". These can all be expressed statistically. Statistics absorb individual variation and, says Durkheim, "the average expresses a certain state of the group mind".

Durkheim's theorising of the concepts of a social fact and of a group mind was challenged right from the start (see his preface to the second edition of his book) and continues to be so. But, if these statistical regularities can be shown and future trends can be projected, then there is certainly something happening which cannot be explained simply as the sum of a mass of random individual actions.

Social Trends 20 (1990) HMSO.
Durkheim, E (1964) "The Rules of Sociological Method". Free Press

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Pound of flesh

In 1985, Mary Beth Whitehead signed a contract agreeing to give birth to a baby for William and Elizabeth Stern in return for $10,000. After "Baby M" was born, Mary Beth decided she wanted to keep the baby.

A battle followed in which, at the instigation of her genetic father, the baby was taken from the mother by judge, lawyers and police. Mary Beth was denied all her parental rights. Only after a campaign and an appeal to the New Jersey supreme court was she allowed liberal, unsupervised access to her daughter.

Phyllis Chesler has written several acclaimed works, including "Women and Madness" and "Mothers on Trial: the Battle for Children and Custody". She was active in the campaign to support Mary Beth Whitehead. This is an extract from Chesler's "Sacred Bond: Motherhood under Siege", recently published by Virago

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The Baby M case is also the story of two women and one man, all united by their passion for the same child. The story has no heroes and no heroines: only monstrously flawed—ie, ordinary—human beings. Which makes the issues even more important.

All over the country, people argued and took sides. We tended to "like" and "feel sorry for" Bill and Betsy, and to "hate" Mary Beth. Everyone felt very strongly about who should "get" Baby M as if we really knew or were entitled to decide; as if this rather public spectacle was, in essence, a family affair.

As it was, we were all "voting" on the future of motherhood and on the future of the human family.

Most of us wanted our future mothers and families to be educated, solidly middle class, and in scientific control of their lives. According to two separate polls, between 74 per cent and 92 per cent of Americans agreed with the decision to place Baby M with her biochemist father (Bill is employed by the Unigene Corporation) and his paediatrician wife (Betsy's Ph.D. is in human genetics) where, as the child of scientists, she would have the kind of life that would inoculate her against the bad teeth, bad grades, bad health and bad luck that characterises life among the hard-working, working-class poor.

Add to this that the media, like everyone else, was also biased in favour of the educated middle class and had more sympathy for the problem of middle-class sterility than for the problem of either working-class *fertility* or sterility.

Sterility has increased—probably due to the combined effects of birth-control technology, delayed childbearing and an increase in environmental toxicity. Simultaneously, abortion and birth control have led to a "shortage" of adoptable white babies. Many of the journalists, as well as the lawyers, judges, psychiatrists and social workers involved in the case either themselves were or knew other middle-class people who were sterile, or adoptive parents, or who had experienced great difficulty in trying to adopt a "desirable" baby. The infertile had our "sympathy vote" at least superficially.

At a deeper level, most people refused to question their own genetic narcissism. For example, no one demanded that *fertile* people adopt a child-in-need before they'd be allowed to reproduce themselves. We were quick to blame the infertile for not wanting to adopt "flawed" children, but we, the fertile, were not about to overturn either adoption procedures or the definition of what constitutes a family.

We (or the entrepreneurs among us) preferred to profit from the suffering of the newly sterile by strip-mining the fertility of the poor, ie, by industrialising polygamy or surrogacy.

Everyone in America focused on one custody battle (Baby M's) as a way of denying (or as the unacknowledged symbol for) the millions of custody battles and legal kidnappings that raged all around us. Men (and higher-income couples) were fighting women (and lower-income couples) for custody of the children birthed by unwed or impoverished third-world mothers and also by marriage-contract mothers.

The Baby M case is what a custody battle is really like. Marriage constitutes the most common reproductive contract between a woman and a man; a wife may have as much (or as little) right to contested custody of her child as Mary Beth Whitehead—or any other "surrogate uterus" does. Ask any divorced woman about the covenant she so eagerly signed with all of patriarchy, but never read or understood.

According to most Americans, not all contracts are created equal. A football or movie star's employment contract may be amended or broken, but a woman's contract with a man about his sperm may not be overturned—at least not without threatening our "procreative liberties", the "joys of parenthood" and our "loving home". These phrases are lawyer Gary Skoloff's, from his appeal brief for the Sterns.

Where were you the day we decided to put biological motherhood on trial? The day a judge in New Jersey ruled that a man's contract with a woman about his sperm is sacred and that pregnancy and childbirth are not?

I was in bed with a bad cold. I turned on the TV in time to catch Dr Lee Salk on the evening news. He was explaining that Mary Beth Whitehead wasn't even a "surrogate mother", that

A doctor explained: Mary Beth wasn't a "surrogate" mother, merely a "surrogate uterus"

she was merely a "surrogate uterus". He said:

> There was no intent on Mrs Whitehead's part to be a functional mother or to care for and raise a child. In both structural and functional terms, Mr and Mrs Stern's role as parents to Baby M was achieved by a surrogate uterus and not a surrogate mother.... The Sterns are far and away more capable of meeting the baby's needs than the Whiteheads. I recommend the complete termination of contract between Mrs Whitehead and the baby.

Dr Salk has had my attention ever since his ex-wife, Kersten, came to see me early in 1976, after she lost custody of their two children to him. I telephone Kersten.

"I am sooo upsyet," Kersten says in her Swedish accent. "I think he's gone too far. That poor mother!"

I remember Kersten's descriptions, both in her trial transcript and in person, of how Lee verbally humiliated her.

On 28 October, 1975, New York Judge Guy Ribaudo awarded sole custody of Pia and Eric Salk to their father, Lee, giving their mother visitation. The judge used an "affirmative standard" to decide which parent was "better fit"—neither had accused the other of being unfit—to guide the "development of the children and their future". To me, it's appalling that Kersten's full-time mothering and home-making were given less weight than Dr Salk's professional expertise. The judge granted both parties a divorce on the grounds of cruel and inhuman treatment on both their parts.

Later, Kersten said she had not told the whole story in court. At a speakout on custody, she said: "Continual attempts were made to break me down emotionally... He engaged in fact-twisting and clever manipulation to show me in a bad light."

I remember how shocked I was by Kersten's story. How could feminists hail Salk's victory as if he were really Dustin Hoffman in *Kramer* v *Kramer*?

Over the next ten years I was to discover that you don't have to be a stay-at-home or an unfit mother in order to lose custody. I could find no explanation other than that mothers were women—and therefore were both impoverished and vulnerable to charges of any kind.

Employed mothers who were custodially challenged lost because they were "working" and still couldn't earn as much as a man. "Career" mothers lost because they were viewed as selfish women who cared more about their careers than about their children.

Although mothers still received no wages for their work at home and far less than equal pay outside the home, although most fathers had yet to assume an equal—or even a significant—share of house-keeping and childcare, divorced fathers launched a highly successful media and legislative campaign for equal to sole custody, alimony and child support, and for mandatory joint custody and mediation.

Since the early seventies, divorce has increased. Custodial mothers and their children are increasingly poor. Between ten and 15 percent of all divorces now involve a major custody battle; the remaining are dominated by threats of a custodial war if a mother demands substantial child support or alimony, the family home and other material assets.

In the spring of 1986, the New York State Task Force on Women and the Courts published a study on sex bias in the courtroom. It concluded that "mothers are losing custody on grounds unrelated to the child's best interest". The study notes the existence of a gender double standard in custodial determinations that "holds that a woman's behaviour must be blameless but a man's indiscretions are to be ignored"; the study also acknowledges the existence of a judicial prejudice against mothers who work full time.

The study states that—contrary to popular myth—children often remain with their mothers upon divorce not because judges are biased against men but by "parental choice", and that "substantial evidence exists that when fathers do litigate custody, they win at least as often as mothers do".

A study published in the *Family Law Quarterly* in 1984 and my own 1986 study *Mothers on Trial*, found fathers win custody at the trial level 62 and 70 per cent of the time, respect-

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"The Judgement of Solomon" by Valentin de Boulogne/Bridgeman Art Library

ively, when custody is contested.

How can this happen? Very easily—in a culture that overvalues men, fathers and money and undervalues women, mothers and mother-child bonding. We also have a double standard for "good enough" mothering and fathering. An ideal father is expected to legally acknowledge and economically support his children. Fathers who do *anything* (more) for their children are often seen as "better" than mothers—who are, after all, supposed to do everything.

The ideal of fatherhood is sacred. As such, it usually protects each father from the consequences of his actions. The ideal of motherhood is sacred too. It exposes all mothers as imperfect. No human mother can embody the maternal ideal perfectly enough.

Therefore *all* mothers are custodially vulnerable because they are women; *all* fathers, including incestuous, violent, absent, passive, or "helper" fathers can win custody, not because mothers are "unfit" or because fathers are truly "equal" parents, but because fathers are men.

The equal treatment of "unequals" is unjust. The paternal demand for "equal" custodial rights; the law that values legal paternity or male economic superiority over biological motherhood and/or over maternal primary child-care, degrades and violates both mothers and children.

Oh, the mothers! The collective message is a chilling one: that children belong to men (sperm donors, boyfriends, legal husbands)— when men want them, but not when men don't. Judges say they can't force a father to see his children. On the other hand, women (birth mothers or primary care-givers) are obliged to mother children—whether they want to or not and under only very harsh and specific conditions.

No birth mother has a right to her child if she's poor or unwed, lives in an impoverished country, signs a surrogacy or adoption contract, or has less money than her child's genetic or legal father.

People think that a child is entitled to maternal care—but not necessarily from her birth mother. Any women—an adoptive mother or stepmother, a paternal grandmother, a housekeeper—will do, as long as, like Betsy Stern, she is obedient to the child's father.

What mother freely chooses to lose her child at birth or later, to the plagues of war, disease, and accident? What slave mother freely hands her child over to his genetic father and master? What mother freely hands her child over to blood strangers to be legally adopted by her "superiors", to be taught to forget her, to be punished for who she is—small hostage of her misfortune, bone of her bone, apple of her eye?

Baby M is every child who has ever been physically, legally, or psychologically separated from her birth mother "for her own good" in the mistaken belief that a child needs a father, a father-dominated family, and/or money far more than she needs her birth mother, love and freedom. ●

There is a review of Phyllis Chesler's "Sacred Bond" on page 32 of the current issue.

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Rachel Furlong

Giving up baby

TOMORROW'S CHILD
Reproductive Technologies in the 90s
Lynda Birke, Susan Himmelweit, Gail Vines
Virago £9.99
SACRED BOND
Motherhood Under Siege
Phyllis Chesler
Virago £6.99
A MOTHER'S STORY
Mary Beth Whitehead
Arrow Books £3.99

Rose Shapiro

A central principle of the modern feminist movement has been the rejection of a biologically determined role for women. Women have the right to an existence not defined by their relationship to children, and motherhood itself can be reconstructed so that women's identities are not annihilated by it.

But there is now a return among feminists to a kind of maternal fundamentalism, which welcomes biology as destiny. This is a response to reproductive technology and related issues such as surrogacy. These new developments are seen as a threat created by patriarchy to women's lives and even to our very existence—if we're no longer needed as units of reproduction, we'll be done away with altogether.

In the past, women's lives were ruled by fatalism and passivity. Resistance to biology (for example in the form of a backstreet abortion) could carry terrible physical risks. Women "fell" pregnant whether they liked it or not, and were mysteriously and intractably "barren" if unable to conceive. But even this can appear preferable to the prospect of technological control over every reproductive process and the introduction of a free and quality-controlled market in babies.

The actions taken and choices made by an individual now have implications for all women. Now that the range of choice is so much greater, no longer is it simply enough to assert "a woman's right to choose" amid the ethical, political and technical complexities of the new reproductive technologies. If Mary Beth Whitehead had the right to choose to give birth to "Baby M" for another couple in return for 10,000 dollars, didn't she also have the right to change her mind? Or should surrogacy be outlawed to make such choices impossible?

Mary Beth Whitehead's *A Mother's Story* sees surrogacy as the unnatural enemy of biologically determined (and therefore real) motherhood. Whitehead's account describes the moment when she realised that she could not part with her daughter as a kind of religious catharsis. "The room was quiet as I sat up in the bed, almost in darkness, with the milk running down my chest and soaking my nightgown. I held out my empty arms and screamed at the top of my lungs, 'Oh God, what have I done—I want my baby!'". Throughout the insemination and pregnancy she has denied and sacrificed her true identity, but following the birth it's as if

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Mary Beth is born again.

Although the surrogacy debate centres ostensibly on the "commodification" of babies, Whitehead's book shows it as equally concerned with the nature of motherhood. Phyllis Chesler's *Sacred Bond*, an account of her own passionate interest in the Baby M case, says it all in the title. Chesler sees mother love as rooted in the biological relationship between what she calls the "birth mother" and her child, and believes that feminists should respond to current debates by reclaiming that sacred bond. What's particularly irritating about her book is that Chesler never comes out as a "born again" mother, so we never get an explicit exposition of these ideas. We can only assume that this belief is what lies between the lines of rhetoric, anecdote and self-aggrandisement which form the bulk of the book.

Both these books come from a peculiar America where there are funeral parlours for poodles and people over 25 think they need a facelift. It's difficult for a British reader to accept generalisations derived from a case where all the protagonists seem to have stepped straight off the set of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, even though the questions they raise have to be taken seriously.

Tomorrow's Child comes from a very different place. The three authors are serious and rigorous about what they do. Mindful that the personal is political, they can still distinguish between private sentiment and social policy. Lynda Birke, Susan Himmelweit and Gail Vines know enough about science and technology not to be intimidated by it. They see how feminists can make demands of reproductive technology in the interests of women, and how they can challenge current scientific practice in order to affect its future.

Early in the book they make a positive distinction between social and biological parenting which would horrify Phyllis Chesler. Current trends in divorce and remarriage mean that many children are brought up in households missing one of their biological parents, allowing another adult to fulfil more of the traditional parental role. "In so far as feminism has always stressed that childcare is real work rather than just the blind following of a biological instinct, the demonstration that biological and social parenting can be split can only be welcomed," they conclude.

Chapters on reproductive technologies and related topics bring together the ethical and the political debate with an impressive lucidity. The authors go beyond a simple "reproductive rights" approach to the new technologies, feeling instead that the reasons why women make particular reproductive decisions have to be addressed. "A woman's right to choose" seems to leave little room for any further discussion, they say, and ignores the material and cultural context of decisions. And from a feminist point of view some reasons for aborting a foetus are good (if a woman does not feel ready to be a mother) while others are bad (if she wants only to give her husband a son). But they go on: "We can hold such opinions without their meaning that we wish to prohibit women from carrying out decisions of which we disapprove."

Even though this departure from absolutism makes life considerably more complicated, *Tomorrow's Child* manages continually to relate ethical complexity to lived experience. Birke, Himmelweit and Vines even dare to see a positive potential in surrogacy, but only if it is in women's control. "We do not see why women should not be enabled to help each other in this way, nor do we have problems with the notion of a woman choosing, rather than being forced by adverse circumstances, to give up a child she has given birth to." Our bonds can be broken, sacred or not.

Bums rushed

THE AGE OF PARODY
Philip Norman
Hamish Hamilton £13.99

Jolyon Jenkins

The Age of Parody is a good title for a book, but a more accurate one would have been *Philip Norman Speaks His Mind*, or even *It Really Is Appalling*. For Norman, an ex-*Sunday Times* journalist, resembles no one so much as the Prince of Wales in unbuttoned mood. HRH, indeed, is one of the few human beings to whom Norman will give the time of day.

Norman, I suspect, sees himself in the same line of work as, say, Jonathan Swift: the deft debunker of contemporary conceits. And what sacred cows he slaughters: Terry Wogan, signs that say "Welcome to Waterloo Station", privatisation advertising campaigns, advertising campaigns of any description, Richard Branson, television clichés, bad pop lyrics, pseudo-Victoriana, Russell Harty, restaurants named after their owners, men's clothes in pastel shades, tourists in London, and Derek Jameson. Swiftian, you see.

The "parody" of the title refers to the late twentieth century habit of recycling cultural signifiers of earlier times into a scarcely coherent mélange. Some people call this "postmodernism". You've probably noticed it yourself. But is it is really *parody* when ginger beer makers put their product into fake-old bottles? A different kind of self-consciousness is involved, surely. But it is not a question on which Norman dwells. Twenty pages into the book he abandons the original subject and simply raids his cuttings file to pad out the remaining 230.

The result is some shameless recycling of his own material. Wogan and Harty are attacked thrice; Branson gets it in the neck twice; pastel colours three times in as many pages. On page ten he sounds off against the "Monday Morning Fever display of low-rise denim trouser-seat and high-rising anal crack"; on page 201 it's "yellow underpant rims and coyly-peeping bottom cracks" that get him all in a lather. I wouldn't complain, except that jokes about décolléte buttocks have been in the public domain for at least two years. On page 21 we find that diners at Langan's "glance nervously round like tail-gunners sweeping the horizon for kamikazes". On page 97, Norman himself is on the look-out for smokers "like a tail-gunner scanning the skies for Messerschmidts". Shame to waste a rattling good simile like that.

Norman's politics at first sight appear soundly *New Statesman*-ish. "Against Ronald Reagan," he writes, "Margaret Thatcher is reduced to the role of bespangled assistant, performing obedient bunny-dips and shouting 'Houpla!'." Closer reading reveals a less appealing side. It's no coincidence, I think, that the book contains, by my reckoning, ten derogatory references to the colour pink. One of his less amusing asides is the allegation that Norman Fowler "reminds of us of Aids". Philip Norman would not like anyone to be in doubt about his sexuality. A whole page is spent on his attempts to persuade a builder that he is not an, excuse me, "arse-bandit". "Most of my life's problems have sprung from quite the opposite cause." Well, we know that, because he has already gone into some detail about the problems of life as a heterosexual bachelor with more testosterone than is good for him.

In the end, this worthless book amounts to two awful warnings. First, journalists should resist the temptation to re-print their old articles. Second, those who want to deplore the triumph of style over substance should look in the mirror first.

Poisoned pen

THE WIMBLEDON POISONER
Nigel Williams
Faber £12.99

Sean French

There is a long tradition of semi-comic fascination with murder in English literature. It was Thomas De Quincey who wrote a famous essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" and George Orwell who lamented "The Decline of the English Murder". In her diaries Virginia Woolf describes TS Eliot going to a fancy-dress party as Dr Crippen.

Henry Farr, the hero of Nigel Williams's new novel, consciously sees himself in a long tradition of suburban English murderers. He fantasises elaborate plans to murder the wife he loathes and then suddenly, and surprisingly, attempts to carry them out. A number of fatalities ensue among the neighbours as Farr's plans go astray.

It seems that Farr has escaped suspicion, but then other murders occur which he doesn't think he has committed. Has he done them unconsciously? Can there be a copycat poisoner at work? And a local detective seems to be taking a sudden interest both in the murders and in Henry Farr.

Nigel Williams has constructed a clever plot that is difficult even to summarise without betraying the author's various twists and deceits, and it could have been told in various styles.

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The Wimbledon Poisoner could have been a straightforward whodunnit, an Alfred Hitchcock-like thriller about transference of guilt, or a grim realistic account of suburban desperation. Characteristically, though, Williams has chosen to tell it as an Ortonesque farce, albeit one that turns more serious.

It is good to see an author taking the art of poison out of the farms and supermarkets, and giving it back to the professionals

The result is a very good read, with a few comic set pieces that are comparable to Wodehouse. There is a brilliantly written scene in which Farr delivers an incoherent eulogy to his only friend, who has died in the course of one of Farr's chemical experiments.

But the jaunty, readable style has its problems as well. John Updike once wrote dismissively of *Lucky Jim*, saying that "there is no need to write 'funny novels', when life's actual juxtapositions and convolutions, set down attentively, are comedy enough". This is unfair as a general point because the best comedy is itself an instrument of exploration, but Updike is right that comedy can be evasion. When it doesn't work this book reads a bit like *L'Étranger* rewritten in the style of Tom Sharpe as an over-extended *NSS* comp entry.

Comic novels are notoriously difficult to sustain, and at 300 pages this is a long one. Williams concludes with a clever twist, though it lets his hero and himself off a little bit too easily. The trouble with a twist is that it can leave the two halves of a novel failing to fit together.

Nevertheless, this is an intelligent, enjoyable and—as our food producers poison us—a timely book. To adapt a saying of Raymond Chandler's, it is good to see an author taking the art of poison out of the farms and supermarkets and giving it back to the professionals.

The lost children

CHILDHOOD, CULTURE AND CLASS IN BRITAIN: MARGARET McMILLAN 1860-1931
Carolyn Steedman
Virago £16.99

Kathryn Dodd

Does your heart drop when you see another biography of some worthy woman from the past? Perhaps you've read (or resisted reading) those feminist hagiographies of exceptional women who were saints or superwomen, or both. But whatever preconceptions you have about the writing of women's lives, be confident that Steedman will subvert them.

A Century of Childhood/Channel Four

'Free expression' dancing in the 1930's

But the subject, in this case Margaret McMillan, is not that easy to subvert: she was called a saint in her own lifetime and had several public lives during a period of history when women were said to be publically and politically invisible.

Using her training as an actress, McMillan became a wildly successful speaker for the newly formed Independent Labour Party. One observer spoke of the way that she addressed her audience with her whole body. On one occasion her charismatic inspiration was so profound that instead of applauding, the vast audience, deeply moved, rose in complete and adoring silence as she left the platform.

While an ILP representative on three Bradford School Boards (posts she kept until 1902, when women were declared ineligible for election), she developed her prolific career as a journalist for the *Bradford Labour Echo*, *The Clarion* and the *Labour Leader*. She popularised her theories on education, including work on child development, physiology and hygiene. Through her concentration on the medical needs of the poorest children she extended the scope and meaning of socialism.

Steedman gives a very good sense of the range of McMillan's ideas, including the significance of the garden and the natural world in education as places of reverie for the child; and the centrality of the redeemed child as an image to move the working class towards socialism. The latter came in the context of the late 19th-century belief that socialism involved not so much an economic understanding of social relationships, as a kind of religion of conversion.

However, McMillan's "sainthood" was not bestowed on her for her intellectual achievements, but for the work she did in the last phase of her life in the London slum district of Deptford. Here, she attempted physically to rescue children by raising charitable funds to provide first a camp-school, and later a clinic, a garden and a nursery school for the area. This is the stuff that legends are made of, and McMillan was perceived as perpetually young and child-like, ministering to the poorest children and teaching that every child should be educated "as if he were your own".

So how does Steedman handle all this in her own writing? First, she decides not to write a conventional biography. The book has no traditional beginning, middle and preordained end. Rather, we are offered a series of histories within a deliberately fragmented form. So the chapters (given names such as "Childhood", "Gardens", "Cities", "Socialism", "Bodies"), appear as overlapping, yet almost self-contained arguments. Each covers a large time-span and each attempts to describe the traffic between the life and the keywords of McMillan's intellectual development. As the rather cumbersome title suggests, the book is a cultural history first, and a biography second.

Steedman also shows what McMillan was *not* able to do because of the absence of appropriate social forms to express her convictions. For example, she was to develop an idea of community education for the poor, including women and children, based on the broadest definition of modern thought, which was beyond the boundary of any existing organisation or definition of worker education. Her Deptford experiment could only be described in the language of welfare philanthropy.

At this point one recognises the continuity of the argument with Steedman's previous work. In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, a biography of her mother, Steedman was struggling with the crippling absence of any interpretative paradigms able to offer a satisfactory explanation of her mother's life. Here, she is struggling against the tendency of biography to foreground the protagonist at the cost of marginalising other players and even whole classes. Perhaps more important, she is trying to write a life which itself never found the institutions within which it could fully realise itself, or its political ambitions. This makes *Childhood* a difficult book, but these difficulties are part of the story Steedman tells.

E for ecstasy

SEMIOTEXT(E) VOL. 14: SF
Edited by Rudy Rucker, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Robert Anton Wilson.
Autonomedia £8.95

Mark Sinker

In the cover-ad for Volume 13 (USA), after 11 Eurocentric issues and the crypto-global *Oasis*, the rogue-academic US journal Semiotext(e) described their direction-shift as follows: "We are amazed. We are NOT BORED. We have discarded the outworn charm of post-modern incommunicadismo." New focus: the scattered, anarchoid-redneck American underground, with all its wormy promise—nudists, monarchists, neo-pagans, mimeo-poets, mad bombers

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and unidentified flying leftists. Foreign agents are exchanged for an enemy within.

If they have a motto up at SemioCentral, it's Wittgenstein's maxim: "What can't be talked about mustn't be." They just can't accept this. So it's really no surprise that editors Rucker (a professor of Mathematics and Computing) and

Unreconstructed troublemakers, Ballard and Burroughs would hate to feel they had socially redeeming value, and this is where they prove it

the unrelated Wilsons (an expert on Islam and a former apparatchik at *Playboy*) have ended up trawling speculative fiction's most disgraceful reaches for bizarre and risky short sci-fi, SplatterPunk, CyberPunk, CyberPorn, and so on.

The bulk, funny-nasty or slimily unnerving, is excellent: Ernest Hogan's "The Frankenstein Penis" or Ian Watson's "Vile Dry Claws Of The Toucan", for example. One or two entries are hopeless (the only excuse for including anything by the time-locked and pitifully pompous Colin Wilson is that he shares a surname with two editors). And the best stories have that lyrically hallucinogenic force which just isn't available in any other genre: Rucker's own "Rapture In Space", or Rachael Pollack's "The Burning Sky".

Some material isn't very well written, in a self-regarding Martin Amis kind of way. This becomes most apparent when you reach the contributions from J. G. Ballard and William Burroughs—two each, tiny, perfectly formed. Ballard's deranged urbanity and Burroughs's impacted wickedness have never been allowed to join the grown-ups on culture's High Tables, in spite of a degree of mainstream praise. Unreconstructed troublemakers, they would hate to feel they had socially redeeming value, and this is where they prove it. Ballard's first contribution is called "Jane Fonda's Augmentation Mammoplasty".

Samuel Delany, Black SF writer and critic, once located science fiction's unique force in one thick fact—its wider range of possible sentences. By using these at what he called "syntagmatically startling points" our potential metaphor bank is vastly enriched. Just consider the opening paragraph of Lewis Shiner's "The Gene Drain": "JSN reached up to the row of glowing buttons across his forehead and changed his mind with an audible click."

Delany is cited as a regretted omission. His interest in weird sex and the journey from underground to respectability and back again would put him in happy company, exposing consensus reality, nudging you out of epistemological complacency. As ever with a Semiotext(e) collection, you feel the diversity of the whole has somehow delayed the effect of some of the parts. But the faintly queasy throb of anticipation that little (e) has always stood for is still your best guide.

John Steinbeck: one of America's alcoholic Nobel Prize winners for literature

Stars and bars

THE THIRSTY MUSE: ALCOHOL AND THE AMERICAN WRITER
Tom Dardis
Abacus £3.99

Anthony Quinn

You won't find their names in any reference book, yet they throng the pages of American literature. They are silent guests at parties, in bedrooms, under tables. They can be the best of friends and the worst of enemies, starting fights, wrecking marriages, generally responsible for some pretty *bad behaviour*. They are known, inter alia, as Jack Daniels, Jim Beam and Johnnie Walker.

Alcohol has been at the centre of American letters this century: seven American writers have won the Nobel Prize, and five of them—Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck—were alcoholics. Tom Dardis, in his introduction to *The Thirsty Muse*, enumerates a cast of literary lushes, and calls into question the peculiarly American notion that good writers are drinking writers. His argument runs that alcohol, far from being a muse, dissipated creativity and caused many talents to burn out prematurely.

In support of this thesis the book adduces four case histories of writers who saw the world through a glass drunkenly, first by choice, then by compulsion. Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway and O'Neill were all great writers—and all full-time alcoholics. Excepting O'Neill, Dardis holds that their greatness resides in the work of their earlier years. As middle age set on and the body's resistance to booze wore down, inspiration flagged and addiction exerted a deadening grip. The party of those early years was over, but the guests spent the rest of their lives paying the tab. Only O'Neill managed to pull himself back from the brink: he stopped drinking at the comparatively young age of 37 and went on to write two major works about the crippling forces of dependency, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

So why did they drink so much? Dardis outlines two important factors, the genetic and the environmental. Recent medical research suggests that alcoholism is a hereditary disease; the cases of Faulkner and O'Neill certainly point to a familial conformity where drink is concerned. All four writers came to prominence during the Prohibition era, when drinking became fashionable as something outré and bohemian. To drink was to put yourself above the law, and having your own bootlegger assumed a fancy social cachet.

Beyond this lay the romantic myth of the drinking writer that went right back to antiquity, founded on the belief that intoxication allowed the artist to scale new heights of consciousness—I drink, therefore I could be. Baudelaire advocated the practice with proselytizing zeal: "Always be drunk. That is all: it is *the* question. You want to stop Time crushing your shoulders, bending you double, so get drunk—militantly." Dardis has little time for the conviction that alcohol inspires genius; for these writers alcohol inspired alcoholism, and that's it.

Given the high incidence of addiction among American writers, why has no one addressed the issue in any detail before? Dardis maintains that biographers are reluctant to confront a writer's drink problem, perhaps because of a refusal to link creative decline with alcohol (or even to acknowledge that decline at all). How could they be alcoholic and write books like that? Yet as you read further into *The Thirsty Muse* you begin to see a more prosaic reason for leaving the subject alone—put simply, it's a crashing bore.

The necessarily monotonous routine of an alcoholic, the binges, black-outs, DTs and detoxifications, imposes a commensurate monotony on this book's rhythm. Dardis is lumbered with the problem of composing variations around the same desperate cycle of abuse—he drank like a fish; he collapsed; he recovered in hospital; he tried to dry out; he drank like a fish. This has no more fascination than watching a mouse treading a wheel.

As respite from this circularity, the book is spiced with telling anecdotes and excerpts from letters and notes. There is the pathetic sight of Faulkner as a paranoid drunk, crouching for cover under the apparent delusion that "the Jerries" were bombing him. Fitzgerald, married to a woman who was not the ideal curb to his drinking, used to indulge in the unamusing habit of flinging ashtrays across the room at parties (which presumably broke a lot more than the ice). Hemingway's case is perhaps the saddest of all, as he believed his robust constitution

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could withstand the punitive effects of liquor. In fact, it exacerbated a vulnerability to depression and insomnia, and eventually did for him.

The Thirsty Muse is well-intentioned and unmalicious, but its avowed emphasis ultimately does its subjects a disservice, turning them from writers who drank into drinkers who wrote. These burnt-out cases also happened to produce a body of work that ranks among the best of this century's literature: who is to say that they would have done so *without* drink? Yes, they were tormented souls, chronic soaks, but that may have been the condition on which genius was granted.

Mass movements

SELECTED STORIES
André Dubus
Picador £13.95

Kirsty Milne

Richie, a 12-year-old Catholic, is a fugitive from the modern permutations of the extended family. His parents are divorced, his elder brother is divorced, and now his father is proposing to marry his brother's ex-wife. Under the circumstances, Richie is afraid of losing his faith. Off the softball field, in the haven of a Massachusetts church, he admits to God, "It will be very hard to be a Catholic in our house."

A world in which your sister-in-law can become your stepmother is one where traditional bonds have liquified. In "Voices from the Moon", the longest and best of the stories collected here, an entire family must painfully adjust to an emotional configuration none of them was equipped for.

The settings for André Dubus's stories are determinedly domestic, and his unassuming prose works its way through the building blocks of physical life. People ruminate with beers on verandahs, fry pancakes for breakfast, scrape the ice off their frozen windscreens. Dialogue is the condensed conversation of characters who know each other intimately: "affectionate and tribal, sounds made between creatures sharing the same blood".

But his dominant motif is a melancholy one: the nuclear family disintegrating gently in a landscape. In "The Winter Father" a separated husband learns, through matinée movies and sledging, the limitations of weekend fatherhood. "Adultery" evokes the terrible late-flowering panic of a woman who discovers that the autonomy of spirit she so loved in her husband is chilling the core of their marriage.

The disintegration is not always gentle. Underneath the beer-drinking and the pancake-making these laconic people harbour a tendency to slow-smouldering mania. In "The Pretty Girl" a rejected husband rapes his ex-wife at knifepoint, returning months later to pour a trail

A world in which your sister-in-law can become your stepmother is one where traditional bonds are liquified

of petrol round her home and set light to it. Dubus puts across with unsettling sympathy the ordinary mentality of the unhinged and the vengeful. The narrator-husband is a regular guy who lifts weights and had a brother killed in Vietnam. In the thick of the story, his actions do not seem unreasonable.

But if a mute violence hibernates in rural Massachusetts, there lingers also the residue of an authoritative Catholicism. It quickens the sexual reconnoitring of Dubus's guilt-ridden boys and inscrutable, seductive girls; yet to his adult characters the church offers sanctuary from their turbulent relationships. The persecuted wife in "The Pretty Girl" finds physical comfort in the atmosphere of weekly Mass, "a blending of cool dry basement air with sunlight and melting candle wax".

In a collection like this, confined in location and muted in tone, there is a danger that all the stories will merge unmemorably into one story. But Dubus is a gratifyingly perceptive writer and his talent for inscribing the links between emotional and physical life sustains structures that would otherwise falter. After sex with her lover, a woman feels she holds "his entire history in her body". A divorced wife, alone in her rented room at night, finds that listening to music "sculpts her sadness into something strong and lovely". In the grip of a strong narrative, such eloquence could be the stuff of a fine novel.

Disjointed memories

ONCE A FEMINIST
Interviews by Michelene Wandor
Virago £6.99

Lucasta Miller

The first ever Women's Liberation conference in Britain was held 20 years ago at Ruskin College, Oxford. The organisers were overwhelmed by the number of women who turned up. Activism was in. And the most frequently repeated slogan was, "the personal is political".

Michelene Wandor's book, accordingly, explores the political through the personal. She interviews a series of women who attended the conference. And they attempt to put into words their memories not only of the conference itself but, most interestingly, of their emotional responses as individuals to the women's movement.

Each woman attempts to fit the conference into her life-story, and to give it meaning in the context of her personal relationships, political allegiances, and professional pursuits. One woman, a housewife who "went along for the ride" with a friend who was covering it for the *New Statesman*, might still seem to be in need of a spot of consciousness-raising ("Actually, I never felt oppressed by men"). But she responds with an impressive insight: "I saw myself in a historical context for the first time, I suppose."

The depressing thing about this book is that it does make the women's movement seem part of history. After the revelations of Ruskin—some of the women describe it with the fervour of a religious conversion—the story seems frequently like a decline into quietism. In describing the sometimes naive optimism of then, it doesn't address the issues of now—in particular, the contradictions of the Thatcher phenomenon when viewed from a feminist perspective.

As one woman puts it, "the truths were more simple then". But contradictions perhaps not

Women should be paid a wage for domestic labour. But on the other hand, housework is so vilified that the assembly line takes on a depth of human dignity by comparison

apparent at the time do rise to the surface. Take housework, for example. On the one hand, women should be paid a wage for their domestic labour. But on the other, housework is so vilified as an activity in itself—in a paper presented at Ruskin and reprinted in an appendix—that the monotony of the assembly line takes on an inherent depth of human dignity by comparison. In such circumstances, payment for housework could never be a wage; only an inadequate compensation.

Most of the women interviewed are middle-class intellectuals. A frequent anxiety is the difficulty of combining their intellectualised feminism with the interests of working-class women. This may seem a commonplace to anyone who has ever thought about it, but it's interesting to see the problem arising through an individual's experience. One woman, a lawyer "never tied to the kitchen sink", feels she inhabits a privileged realm of emancipation. But she suddenly becomes aware of her "very middle-class solution" to housework: she pays someone else (presumably a woman) to do it for her. The question of her own "liberation" thus becomes more complex: is it at the expense of another woman's?

Though it remembers a polemical time, this book is not itself polemical. It doesn't attempt to sort out the ideological problems which it raises. But the honesty with which, in retrospect, once clear-cut ideologies are given an emotional dimension is admirable.

One woman admits her *relief* at discovering that women were oppressed: at home with her black boyfriend she could now escape feelings

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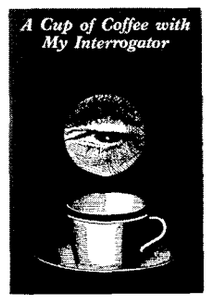
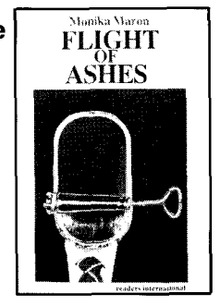
My Merry Mornings (005) by Ivan Klíma, **Prague**
'His voice is clear, intelligent and brave' *International Herald Tribune*

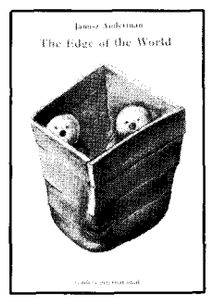


A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator (035) by Ludvík Vaculík, **Prague**
'Cool and sparkling' *New York Times Book Review*

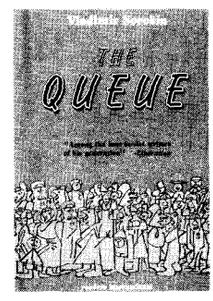


Flight of Ashes (023) by Monika Maron, **East Berlin**
'Maron writes with wit, economy and stylistic assurance' *Village Voice*

The Defector (041) by Monika Maron, **East Berlin**
'The best of her generation' *Le Monde*
'Extraordinary writing' *Publishers Weekly*



Edge of the World (050) by Janusz Anderman, **Warsaw**
'Harsh realism, yet something magical in the result' *L. A. Times*



The Queue (045) by Vladimir Sorokin, **Moscow**
'Genuine zest' *The Times*
'Like Godot, but its humour is broader and nowhere so stark' *N. Y. Times Book Review*

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of guilt about being somehow implicated in white supremacy.

The only problem with *Once a Feminist* is its format. It could have been more rigorously edited. Taking the Ruskin conference as its focal point was a good idea. But it sometimes leads to rather rambling repetitions. It is ironic that the book presents itself as a series of dissociated monologues, as the political emphasis is so frequently on cooperation, dialogue, and making women feel part of a group.

Perhaps this is a metaphor for the fragmentation of the Women's Liberation movement since then. But it deadens the immediacy of the recollections. You wish these women were talking to each other, rather than in isolated chapters, because then you could compare their responses more readily. Their personal testimonies are interesting in themselves. But they somehow feel as if they have been unnaturally wrested out of conversations to be pinned down in print.

Clifford Stoll

Stranger than fiction

THE CUCKOO'S EGG
Clifford Stoll
The Bodley Head £12.95

Robert Carver

Forget Len Deighton, John Le Carré, and the Man from U.N.C.L.E. Instead try this on for size: a long-haired ex-hippy astronomer computer jockey from Berkeley, Ca. notices a 75 cent imbalance on his lab's computer accounts. A trace tells him someone is entering the Berkeley network illicitly, using an absent subscriber's name, and by a mixture of guile, guesswork and computer knowhow is leapfrogging through other computer networks in search of information, particularly on military and space research. Not content with this, the mystery hacker manages by bluff and persistence to discover encrypted code entry passwords. They allow him to roam freely inside supposedly secure computer networks, granting himself super-user privileges to strip software, copy *and* lay his cuckoo's eggs: his own programmes, implanted in systems and able to steal or wipe all or any files at will.

A local California hacker, a student or high school computer freak out for kicks? At first Cliff Stoll thinks so. Then, as the interloper becomes more and more ambitious, things begin to get heavier and weirder—a kingsize international electronic spy? Wow! (Stoll's witty, half-hippy, half-computerspeak lingo is infectious). After initial scepticism even the US spooks and G-men start to get interested. Our dogged invisible hacker, clocking up thousands of hours of computer time, is being observed, monitored and logged by the equally patient Stoll.

The FBI, CIA, NSA and half a dozen more shadowy US computer security agencies get involved—but will take no action themselves. Stoll ends up devoting ten hours a day to logging and tracking the unknown hacker, who has now found his way into US army and Airforce missile bases from Alabama to Okinawa in Japan. The hacker breaks into supposedly inviolable systems through backdoors and untraceable soft entry methods, and even hacks into the Pentagon itself.

Hooked on the information Stoll feeds them, the CIA and FBI seem all but paralysed. Although he has systematically stripped unclassified military software, the only offence the FBI can pin on the shadowy pirate is stealing 75c of Berkeley computer time. "Come back when they've ripped you off for half a million," one FBI agent tells Stoll. "Not our bailiwick," claims the CIA.

Finally sick of Stoll spending half his life tracking the hacker, his boss orders him to "Close the trace". The CIA and FBI start shrieking with withdrawal symptoms. Stoll's boss is told to keep Cliff on the trace—the FBI will pick up the tab.

The search, through telephone monitoring of the hacker's calls, leads to Virginia and then via satellite to Europe. Germany is pinpointed, then Hanover. Every time the hacker logs in they get a little bit closer, but never quite close enough. Cliff Stoll has a pager rigged up so that if the hacker keys in at 3am he can be up to alert the international team of phone tracers. His long-suffering girlfriend just has to put up with it all. The technology of call tracing in Germany proves to be impossibly antique. They need over an hour to make a precise location. How can Stoll keep the hacker on line for long enough?

He and his girlfirend devise "Operation Showerhead", a huge pseudo-classified series of files with bogus but plausible Strategic Defence Initiative—"Star Wars"—information. Copying it will take hours. Will the hacker fall for the sting? Will the FBI and CIA let Stoll try it? Neither agency will approve or disapprove. Stoll goes ahead with his entrapment. It works. The hacker logs in, sees SDI and goes apeshit—he wants the lot. The pieces fall into place, and at last the German *Bundespost* traces the hacker's address and telephone number.

No one will tell Stoll, who has done all the work, who it is. But by now the media have the story and Cliff and his lab go public with a press conference. The villain turns out to be one Markus Hess, who with computer freaks codenamed Pengo and Hagbard from the Computer Chaos Club in Germany have been hacking into US military software for years—and not just for fun. Their paymaster was the Soviet KGB, who supplied cocaine and large sums of money in exchange for the computer printout data they received.

One of the joys of this fascinating, funny book is that you don't need to know anything about computers to enjoy it. If Spielberg hasn't bought the movie rights already, I'm a Dutchman

Cliff Stoll got a CIA award—a dubious accolade to a long-haired lefty ex-hippy—the hackers were prosecuted, and everything ended happily.

Or did it? After the scare computer security got no better and a joker unleased a devastating virus which laid a whole network out for two days while Stoll and his aides tracked it down and neutralised it.

Could it all happen again? For sure, says Stoll. There is a grisly finale: while on bail in Hanover awaiting trial the hacker codenamed Hagbard is found in a remote part of the forest. All that is left is a pile of his bones next to an empty, burnt-out can of petrol, with a borrowed car nearby. There was no suicide note.

Pretty good sci-fi computer thriller, huh? It all just happens to be true. Cliff Stoll makes the whole thing seem like a fun romp, with asides about homebaked cookies, Grateful Dead concerts and the perils of cycling in California. All this spoofing around can't hide his own computer brilliance, though.

One of the joys of this fascinating, tautly written, funny book is that you don't need to know anything about computers to enjoy it. Unputdownable and three-star recommended. If Speilberg hasn't bought the movie rights already I'm a Dutchman. Tom Waites would be perfect for playing Cliff Stoll.

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ARTEFAX

Cut-price

Stuart Cosgrove meets inspired 'art copyist' Susie Ray

Susie Ray is bright, young and bourgeois, the very last person you would expect to meet on an open visit to Holloway Prison. And you would be right. She is an artist who runs a polite and carefully decorated studio-gallery which nestles on the fringes of Covent Garden, a million miles away from the inside of a women's prison. But if Susie Ray, even honestly, forgets to put her signature on the back of her paintings and they fall into the wrong hands, then Susie Ray—bright, young and bourgeois—could, however unjustly, be accused of art forgery and end up on the wrong side of the cell door.

Susie Ray is one of a small but élite group of highly skilled, scientifically trained painters who have been blessed with the phenomenal ability to imitate the styles and surface appearances of famous artists and priceless masterpieces. She is a fake in the most pleasant sense of the word.

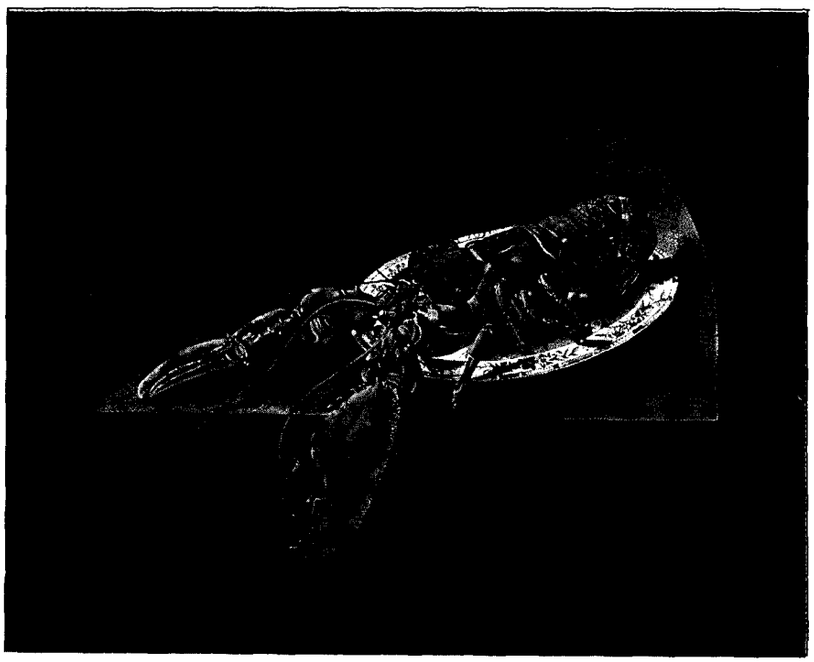
Her studio is a cut-price Tate Gallery. Among the many masterpieces that hang on her gallery walls are indistinguishable imitations of works by Modigliani, Caravaggio, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet and James Whistler. Eventually they will all be sold to a secret array of art collectors who for their own reasons want an imitation of the real thing.

Although she is openly aware of her inspired skills, Susie is quietly resigned to an odd job which unintentionally stretches the boundaries of originality and throws aesthetic values like order, authenticity and genius into disarray. Susie Ray is far from philosophical about what she does but by *doing* it, she becomes engulfed in the philosophies of art and mimesis, a bit like a fully insulated and double-glazed window on the world.

"It is a business, there's no other explanation," she claims, refusing to be dragged into art debates. "I know I have a talent, it's something I've had since I was a child, but I use it more as a science rather than an art."

"There is nothing original in what I'm doing," she says. "There were art-copyists in da Vinci's day. There were art-copyists in the Victorian era. I don't have a style of my own, and I can't honestly say I have the urge or the inspiration to develop a style of my own. I prefer paying respect to masterpieces by copying them immaculately. It is a job. A job I do very well."

Immaculate reproductions done as one-off



Cut-price old masters from Susie Ray's collection of 'Originals'. Top, Paul Gauguin's 'We Greet Thee, Mary'; above, Charles Collins' 'Lobster on a Delft Dish'

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art-works by a precociously talented young woman are as close as you will ever get to the original. But Susie happily concurs with the old Walter Benjamin maxim, that even in the age of mechanical reproduction the original still retains a unique aura, a sense of almost religious specialness which is bestowed by galleries, frames, auctions, posters, coffee-table art books and the heightened wonder of the informed art expert.

Susie Ray's career began somewhat implausibly in Kew Gardens where she worked as a botanical illustrator, doing "intense but very tedious paintings of flowers". The money was poor, the work irregular, and on several occasions Susie was held hostage to the fortunes of the fuschias, beginning one painting but returning the next day to find the plant had died.

With three years of illustration and a degree in science illustration behind her, she moved into the more lucrative world of interior design, painting large *trompe d'oeil* murals on the homes and offices of the *nouveaux riches*. The laws of designer perspective and the art of painstaking design prepared her for the strange and misunderstood world of artistic imitation.

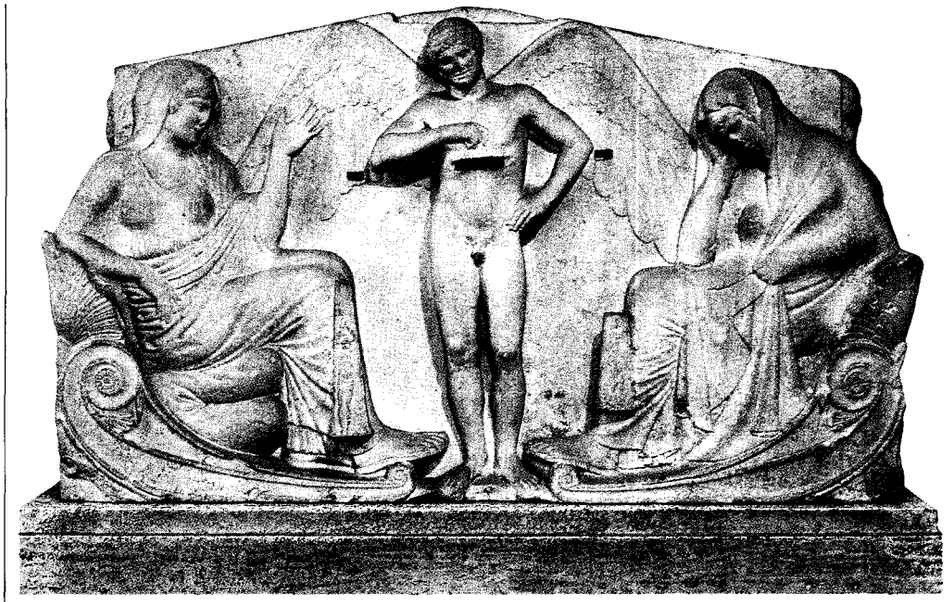
Detail, a diligent eye and the ability to research the look, texture and colouration of leading works of art are the basic skills of her trade. In the main, she works to commission and charges her clients on the basis of labour costs rather than the estimated cost of the masterpiece she is imitating. If you have £5,000 in crisp ones, Susie will do Gauguin's *Girl with a Fan* for you and chuck in her own signature for free.

It is the signature, and her confident business manner, which separate Susie Ray from the common or garden art forger. "Nothing illegal is happening," she says reassuringly, "I am selling original pieces of art, painted by me, signed by me but in the style of other better-known artists."

Susie is reluctant to be forced into the fly-by-night school of fake artists typified by the late Tom Keating, the bearded artist who was jailed for deception in bygone days. "Keating's watercolurs were appalling," she claims, nearly convincing me that fake art has a similar hierarchy of values to high art. "His paintings verged on kitsch. I can't believe anyone was fooled by them. Only a world as greedy as the art auctions would be fooled."

Susie is protective about her clients and adamant about maintaining their anonymity. Who would want to own a perfect imitation of Charles Collins' *Lobster on a Delft Dish*? Who would have the gall to hang Auguste Renoir's *Young Girl after a Bath* above their fireplace? And who would have the rank bad taste to spend five grand on James Whistler's *Nocturne in Blue and Gold*? Susie insisted that her client list is strictly off the record and swore me to absolute secrecy. At no stage did it strike her that there was such a thing as fake journalism. I would happily divulge the names of famous personalities who own her paintings, but journalistic fakery risks a retribution that artists need not fear.

Susie Ray Originals is at 10 Stukeley Street, London WC2



Duping American art-lovers? The relief which Boston Museum of Fine Arts insists is classical. But some experts believe it's a 19th century fake

Art

Improving the ancients

Classical forgeries lurk in museum basements, says David Sox

On the wall of the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad is a marble relief by the 15th century Florentine master Antonio Rossellino. On a visit to Leningrad two weeks ago, I watched a respectful group of tourists admiring its sugary patina.

It's a fake. The relief is just a hundred years old, the work of the great 19th century Italian forger Giovanni Bastianini.

What's more, it's a recycled fake. According to no less an authority than Sir John Pope-Hennessy, the relief was bought in Italy by a Russian, Madame Bibikow, who offered it to the Hermitage. The museum refused it as a fake, but a collector called Yourawlew liked it and decided to give it a wash. The relief came out of its bath "as white as sugar", and in 1915 it was again offered to the Hermitage. This time they took it, and called it a Rossellino.

This story—in endless variations—has been repeated over and over again in the long history of art forgery. Bastianini's successor in Italian fakery was Alceo Dossena, whose tomb by "Mino da Fiesole" was sold to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in for $100,000 in 1924. In the same year Helen Clay Frick bought Dossena's marble *Annunciation*, set in the style of Simone Martini, for a staggering $225,000.

No one likes to be deceived, especially not museums which have forked out high sums for what they thought were great treasures. Nor do museums readily admit their mistakes. As a Canadian curator has put it: "There are definitely colleagues who feel it's naughty to talk about forgery. It's a subject experts debate *sotto voce* at cocktail parties or in the privacy of an office. The pattern has tended to be that, if you have doubts about specific works, you never mention it—or, if so, only to close colleagues."

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts does not like current suggestions that what it considers to be the companion piece to Rome's celebrated *Ludovisi Throne* is actually a fake. The Roman art historian Margherita Guarducci was not the first to say so, but she is the first to present a complete case. She has even identified the 19th century forger—Pacifico Piroli—who cut the Boston relief from an old sarcophagus and refashioned it with the advice and direction of two very distinguished archaeologists.

The Boston Museum continues to believe the relief is Greek, from the fifth century BC. Boston is going to be surprised by what I have recently uncovered in researching the lives of the two men—Edward Perry Warren and John Marshall—who purchased the piece for the museum in 1894.

In a dusty old notebook of John Marshall's, hidden for 60 years at the Ashmolean Library in Oxford, is a point-by-point confirmation of Guarducci's case. An extra touch is that Piroli lived next door to the Ludovisi family's head manager—and guess what was for many years sitting in his back garden, acquiring an aged look?

The visitor to the British Museum's new exhibition **Fake? The Art of Deception** will not see the high-priced fakes of Piroli, Dossena, Bastianini and others. Boston Museum still keeps in its basement the tomb supposedly by "Mino da Fiesole," but actually by Dossena—the museum has yet to admit it was fooled. Also in storage, at New York's Metropolitan Museum, are the three outrageous

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"Etruscan" warriors bought by John Marshall early this century and not unmasked until 1961.

God knows where Dossena's *Athena* is. This "ancient Greek" statue was purchased by an associate of Warren and Marshall for the Cleveland Museum, Ohio, for $120,000 in 1927. In the same month Cleveland returned Dossena's wooden *Madonna and Child*—supposedly by the Florentine Pisano—to the Italian dealer who had duped them.

Today museums are not being offered pieces of this order: the great age of fakery was early this century. American museums wanted to build their collections along the European models, which is why they were so susceptible to faked masterpieces. There are only so many real treasures for sale; even today, ultra-rich establishments like the Getty museum in California find it hard to get what they want, and are fair game for new fakery.

But although there do not appear to be forgers of the Dossena, Bastianini or van Meegeren calibre around any more, there does seem to be an increase in the number of restorers who are prepared to have a go at forgery. In Leningrad, massive government-sponsored restoration schemes have created a class of master restorers. The tourist easily sees this in evidence at Peter the Great's summer palace, Peterhof. Two restorers I met there readily admitted they had produced a few fakes "for the black market". They needed the money.

Among today's most successful forgers is Christian Goller, who was trained at Stuttgart's Institute of Restoration. Goller boasts: "Any determined forger—at least of painting and polychrome wood sculpture—can easily outwit the sleuths at the museums. That is, if he is willing to invest enough time and effort." Goller certainly has: one of his forgeries of the 16th century German painter Mathis Grünewald was sold to the Cleveland Museum in the 1970s for $1 million.

There is an important question mark in the title of the British Museum's exhibition which accounts for discussion in the show of the recently carbon dated Turin Shroud and the still debated Vinland Map. There are many variations in this fine art, and often the motive to deceive is not present. The art historian Alfred Lessing has argued: "Pure aesthetics cannot explain forgery. Considering a work of art aesthetically superior because it is genuine, or inferior because it is forged, has little or nothing to do with aesthetic judgment or criticism. It is rather a piece of snobbery."

The late Kenneth Clark wrote that when he was taught drawing at school there were a dozen casts he was required to draw in pencil. Four of them were by Bastianini; another was a 19th century bust of Julius Caesar. As Mark Jones writes in the British Museum's superlative catalogue: "Had Bastianini not become enraged by the profits being made from his work (thus exposing himself as a forger), we, like Kenneth Clark's master, might have a conception of Renaissance art formed around his work."

Fake? The Art of Deception opens at the British Museum on 9 March and continues until September.

Television

Old-fashioned yuppie

Paul Morley on capitalist punch in Central's new drama series

At first sight, at first thought, during the first episode, baby bastard Clive Owen as the naughty **Chancer** (ITV Tuesdays 9pm) comes into view as a sort of son of Sheen playing the son of JR in a mini-series written by the son of Barbara Cartland based on the son of Vic Kiam's life and a couple of issues of the *FT*.

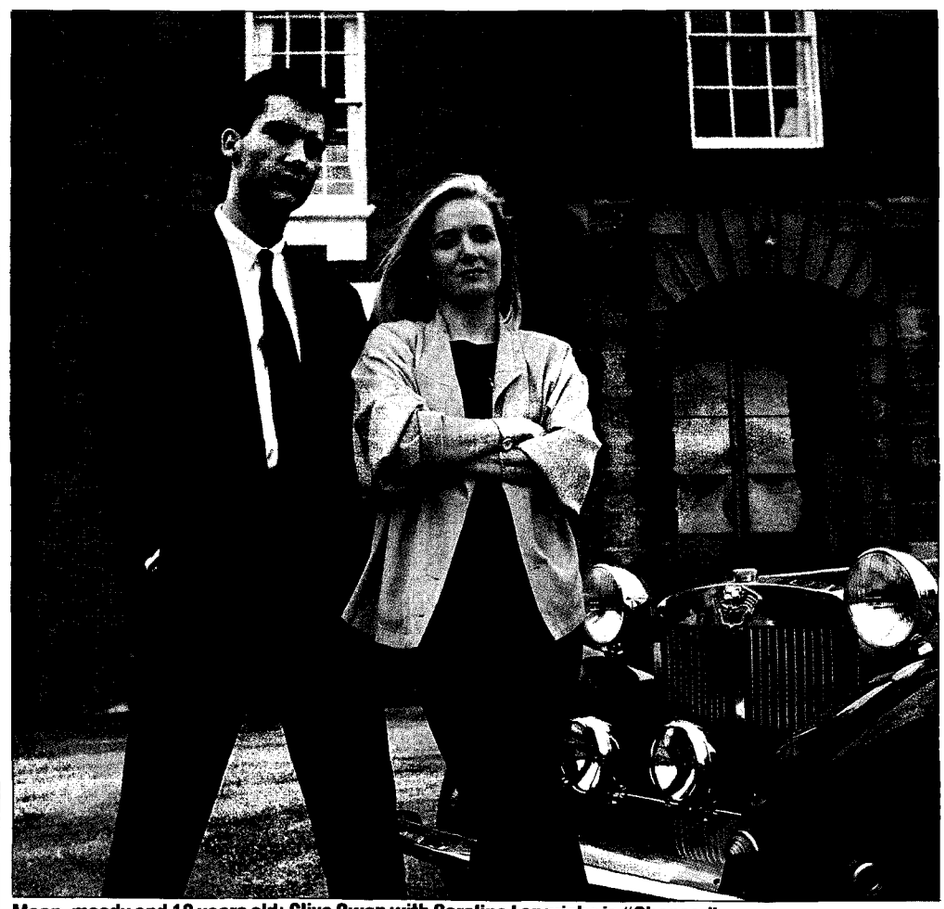
For the first few minutes, it dribbles on the edge of being as bad and virtually inhuman as *Making News*. It could even be a series that makes *Capital City* seem a magical representation of real modern life. The Chancer seems to be a silly saint smoothie acting the old fashioned yuppie goat in a 1980s England that's a lovingly produced blend of Mid-Mortimershire, early *Crossroads* and (just to give it some capitalist punch) lots of well Conran-ed concrete glass and steel and Dalek gatherings of green-stained computer screens.

The first time we see Stephen Crane, our would-be loveable sinner, he's looking mean, moody and 12 years old, while his girlfriend wears nothing but a damp towel as she stares out at the view of Tower Bridge that is always used in programmes such as *Stolen*, *Blind Date* and *The Sweeney* to denote metro-sophistication. The Chancer is all cock and sure, makes money by doing something they call *management consultancy*, and loves to say things like "live fast, die young, leave a good looking corpse," as if management consultancy is somehow a lot like being the lead singer in Guns'n'Roses.

The second time we see our villain in baby fluff he's necking on an expensive sofa with his unfortunate girl friend: his mind, of course, is elsewhere. He wants to help his old boxing friend's father-in-law's ailing car business, for some ruthless reason that's not quite clear. It *is* made clear to us that he's a demon with a capital city D; you just have to look at the hard sparkle in his eyes and the neat knot in his Versace tie to know that he means it, man. Wherever he is, handling his poor girlfriend, on his power phone, or his mystical computer, or speaking in speed credit codes with his boss, he's apt to suddenly swing into a junior Eastwood pose and exclaim things like "Never Say Die" with staggering authority, as if he's just thought of something positively Trumpian.

What a city nit wit, what a second-rate TV creep. After Episode One, you never want the Chancer to weaken your TV screen again. If you know of anyone like him in what must be the real world, hit him for me.

He charges up the motorway, a true



Mean, moody and 12 years old; Clive Owen with Caroline Langrishe in "Chancer"

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Thatcher champion, to sort out the broken car firm in a whisk of superanalysis and business virtuosity. How are they going to make up 13 episodes out of the mechanically arrogant Chancer getting caught up in the squabbles and troubles of a drily eccentric upper class family messed up by life?

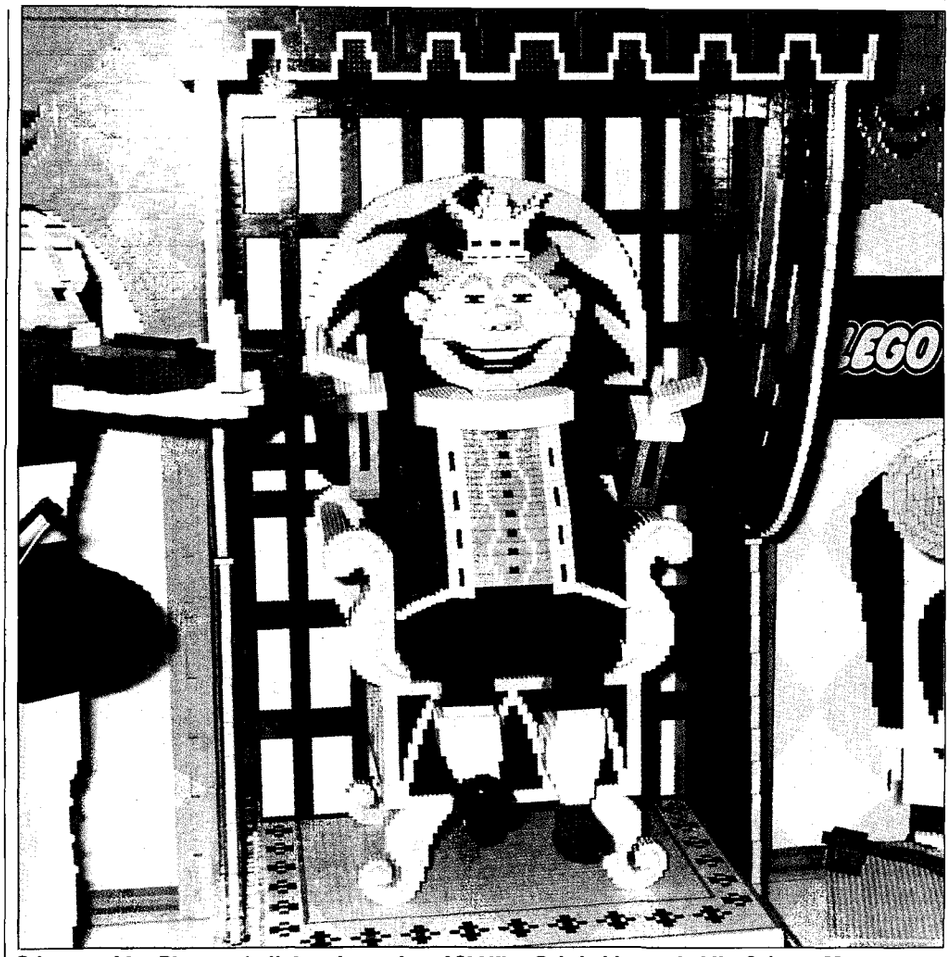
The thing is, if you're so inclined, it's best not to make your mind up after the introductory episode. Take a chance, and stick around. Episodes Two and Three suggest that *Chancer* may not be that good but isn't as seriously misjudged as the first few minutes suggested. To be properly technical and comparative about this, it looks as if it is better than *Boon*, hipper than *Morse*, classier than *Capital City*, and as engaging as any old Ruth Rendell. Good, solid, thoughtful British TV storytelling, a moderately convoluted story of personality clashes that drops little hints, and hurries to a point, and slows to a pause, and floats a vague moral or two, and get a mite wry, and maybe gets moving, and then gets solved, or not, as the case may be.

Another bunch of vague characters elegantly selected out by friendly faces such as Leslie Philips, Benjamin Whitrow, Peter Vaughan and Frank Windsor. It's the kind of stuff they play in their sleep, unavoidably enjoyable because it's always on the plum lip of camp, like Terence Alexander's bluster in *Bergerac*. Another obligatory bunch of slick dressed 20—and 30—somethings, who all look like the contestants in *The Crystal Maze*, Next-ed and fake-Chanel-ed to the hilt.

Crane the Chancer, unveiled in Episode One as a sickening city slicker, highly-sexed and lowly-moralled and all that, is soon seen to be just a lost, loveable rogue, probably with a heart of gold, but at least he becomes more watchable. The point, if you're so inclined, is that the rootless, emotionally retarded Chancer gets tangled up in the enclosed, tragic, loving, deeply traditional Douglas family led by the quietly desperate Whitrow.

The Chancer makes money out of nothing; Douglas lives out his inherited dream, committed to hand-building beautiful British sports cars. The Chancer seems to care for nothing but himself; Douglas seems to care for his family, the quality of his cars, his employees. Perhaps in the end they're as selfish as each other. The Chancer charges into the quaint Douglas world and both of them are changed. It's all set up for a nice cosy English clash of values, clash of generations and so on. Loose living versus truthfulness, self-indulgence versus industry, chastity versus deceit, Old England versus New England, craft versus craftiness, a remote examination of how the 1980s has shaken up the British way of living, a sustained ambiguity about where your sympathies should lie.

We've seen it all before, sometimes not so well put together, sometimes not so generalised. It's OK. Heaven knows why anybody wanted so much to make it, heaven knows why the inevitable seven or eight million will get hooked, heaven knows why anyone would want to write about it. Somewhere in all this, somehow, it must be real modern life.



Cringe-making Disney roboti: Lego's version of Old King Cole holds court at the Science Museum

Design

Architects in the nursery

Janet Abrams doubts the versatility of Lego

Saturday afternoon and the third floor of the Science Museum resembles a bunfight in Hamleys: hundreds of children plunging elbow-deep into tubs of Lego, pawing their selected bricks, avidly fixing them with the determined pressure of tiny fingers. Their parents look on bemused as they might at a municipal swimming pool, which is what the hullaballoo certainly sounds like.

The museum is hosting a show originally organised by Clwyd County Council (**The Art and Science of Lego**, Science Museum, till 30 April) Here, for free (at least, after 4.30pm) are all the Lego blocks anyone could ever want, enough to drown in.

This is not so much an exhibition as a miniature theme park, complete with adjacent cafe and a sales booth where there are Lego products for all ages. One asks oneself whether this is the kind of event a respectable national museum ought to be staging, corporate PR with only the most minimal pedagogical gloss.

Lego vaunts itself as an educational toy. But apart from the hands-on section, what the show parades is a thin history of the product's development, models commissioned from an assortment of artists, scientists and educationalists, supposedly to demonstrate the versatility of this simple building system.

They fall into three categories: abstract sculpture, figurative replicas, and more-or-less purposeless machinery. Most are, frankly, grotesque—especially the faithful reproductions of organic forms (a dolphin; a seated "museum attendant"; a court scene; the Coronation coach complete with "Queen") which have the cringe-making effect of Disney audio-animatronic robots. Lego faces are like cliff faces, in strata of lurid hues. The principal interest in these "life-like" re-creations is in how far the fabricator has overcome the components' insistent rectilinearity to simulate curvature.

It is significant that the least inspired offerings are by architects, who used the commission to create scale models of proposed schemes. The results may *represent* something quite interesting, but as objects they lack vitality, and the pimply modularity of Lego defeats the objective of seductiveness, normally achieved in architectural models using smooth planed wood, or highly-finished perspex.

Lego seems most suited to the construction

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of abstract form, or arbitrary machinery, like the factory for recycling Barbie Dolls or Peter Markey's apparatus which generates a wave-motion in long fingers of red, yellow and blue—the standard colours.

There are now all kinds of customised elements in the Lego vocabulary. But in essence it has not changed since the Danish inventor, Ole Kirk Christiansen, shifted from wooden blocks to mass-produced moulded plastic in the late 1940s, and added tubular hollows to the underside of the studded bricks, thus affording the hallmark snapping sound which confirms that each block is locked in position.

Sold in over 125 countries, and manufactured in five (Denmark, Switzerland, South Korea, Brazil and the USA), Lego is truly a multinational enterprise, which prides itself on being a *lingua franca*: word-free instruction diagrams are supplied with the more complicated models, which are generated using computer projections.

So does this toy really transcend cultural boundaries, to address a common level of fascination with spatial possibilities? To judge by the expressions on the five year olds' faces, yes. Lego combines infinite permutations of stacking with ease of manipulation: the blocks are lightweight, manageable by small hands, and durable. It represents an evolution of the wooden blocks popularised by Friedrich Froebel, the 19th century "kindergarten" pioneer, which captivated the young Frank Lloyd Wright. Some wooden precursors are displayed, unlabelled, in a side-case at the Science Museum.

These fripperies have been safely banished from the Lego universe, which is arguably the modernist toy *par excellence*, privileging the straight line over the curve. Even its palette is resolutely De Stijl: grey, black, and white extend the range, and the transparent blocks bear a pleasing resemblance to glass bricks, beloved of Modernist architects from Pierre Chareau to Richard Meier and David Chipperfield.

But it would be too simplistic to suggest that dexterity with Lego indicates an aptitude for architecture at a later date. While it may promote some spatial awareness, and engender delight in forming large structures out of small, repetitive units, Lego reduces "design" to a process of serial addition, in a restricted range of moves which eliminates even diagonal superimposition, and limits the issue of surface texture to smooth, knobbly or hollow plastic.

Despite its apparent modernity, Lego's claim to pedagogical influence probably lies less in an inducement to make serrated-edged facsimiles of known objects, but in a more Victorian appeal to the virtue of patience. Looking through a glass cabinet at a particularly formidable Lego vehicle, I overheard a young mother berate her son. "You don't *have* to make guns with it," she began, before haranguing him about the need to apply himself, at successive sittings, in order to confect such sophisticated artefacts out of banal lumps of plastic. "You can't build that in a day," she admonished. "It's no use throwing it all over the floor, because if you do, when I come round with the hoover, I'm clearing the whole lot right out of the house."

Music

Subversive sound

Donald Sturrock celebrates a visit by Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke

The Russians have a suspicious attitude towards words. This was one of the first things my Russian teacher explained to me. From the ancient mystics of dark antiquity to 20th century poets like Osip Mandelstam, he argued, Russian thinking has been characterised by the belief that a thought expressed is tantamount to a lie.

This sense that language not only lacks the answers to life's most important questions, but even the capability to put those questions, has meant that the Russians have come to regard music as an art form of unusual philosophical and spiritual importance.

It was Dmitri Shostakovich who harnessed the political implications of this idea. He was able to evolve a sophisticated language of musical irony and satire, of meaning and counter-meaning that enabled him to bridge the gap between official and unofficial culture, thus facing the horrors of Stalinism, and the miseries of Brezhnevite stagnation without compromising his integrity and without prolonged spells in a labour camp.

His legacy has been a complicated one for his successors to unravel, but over the last 20 years **Alfred Schnittke** has been gradually doing so. The celebration of his music, which reached its climax in London this week, has done much to show British audiences how successfully he has unwound and rewoven the twisted threads which make up the complex fabric of Russian music.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Schnittke emerged as the leading figure amoung a group of new composers who took Shostakovich's challenge to the system a step further. Schnittke himself has always denied being a political composer, but in a country like the Soviet Union, his musical experiments and in particular his massive sprawling *First Symphony*, with its jibes at the banality of "official" music, its vicious quotations from the classics and its anarchic destruction of conventional form, could not but have a political dimension. That was why no one in Moscow or Leningrad would perform it, though it was "pure music" in the sense that it had no text. When it was finally performed in out-of-the-way Gorky in 1972, its apocalyptic mixture of "absolute gravity with absolute emptiness" was immediately hailed as a major landmark in Russian musical history. Its non-verbal language spoke clearly even to the bureaucrats in the Union of Composers. Sound itself could be subversive. Schnittke was a marked man.

But like Shostakovich, Schnittke was really concerned with something else: the big questions of life. Opportunities to put those questions were hard to find. Starved of official commissions, denied the opportunity to travel abroad, he was forced to write film music to earn his bread. In 20 years he composed music for over 60 films—much of it hack work, but he was not entirely wasting his time. He learned to pastiche rock and roll, to "compose" folk songs, and to write cabaret music by day with the same pen that wrote symphonies at night. It also gave him a healthy sense of what ordinary people responded to in music.

Schnittke's sense of unity in diversity stems perhaps from his own history. His family lived among other German speakers on the banks of the Volga until war broke out, when most of their community were deported to Siberia. The Schnittkes were allowed to stay because the family was classifed as Jewish. They almost starved, and young Alfred was saved largely by his grandmother, whose kitchen garden fed the family, and who was herself supported by her staunch Catholic faith. Her long conversations with God on winter nights had a profound effect on him and were crucial to his decision to return to the Church after thirty years of agnosticism.

His music has puzzled many Western commentators, with its eclecticism, the confident juxtaposition of different musical styles, his use of quotation. How is a critic, used to the limited horizons of most contemporary western composers, to come to terms with a cantata based on the German medieval Faust legend, which quotes from Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, which includes Lutheran chorale and an orchestra with electric guitars, and which features at its climax Mephisto's gory monologue set to a slow tango? And this is not at all unusual in a Schnittke piece. It has led to the accusation that he has no voice of his own. Audiences around the world disagree, but few can tell you why. His music is clever, often brilliantly inventive, sometimes mockingly satirical, but it is also tender and yielding, forceful, delicate and often powerfully theatrical.

> *"... And words return to music*
> *And heart, feel shy in heart's presence*
> *At one with the essence of life."*
> —*Osip Mandelstam*

In recent years, his reputation among musicians has soared and he now has more commissions than he can cope with. The Germans and Scandinavians have seized on him as a profoundly important and popular figure. Britain has some way to go, but it is bound to happen here too. The Barbican audience last week which leapt to its feet after a performance of his *Sonata for Violin and Strings* did not expect to do so. The music is simply irresistible. And in an age in which much contemporary serious music seems content to remain in a ghetto, where obscurity is hailed as a virtue, and where melody and feeling are viewed with suspicion, it is heartening to be able to salute a composer of the first rank whose work is profound and yet immediately accessible. Words really do seem limited. They must return to music.

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Film

Scotching the Rambo myth

Suzanne Moore finds Oliver Stone telling the truth about Vietnam

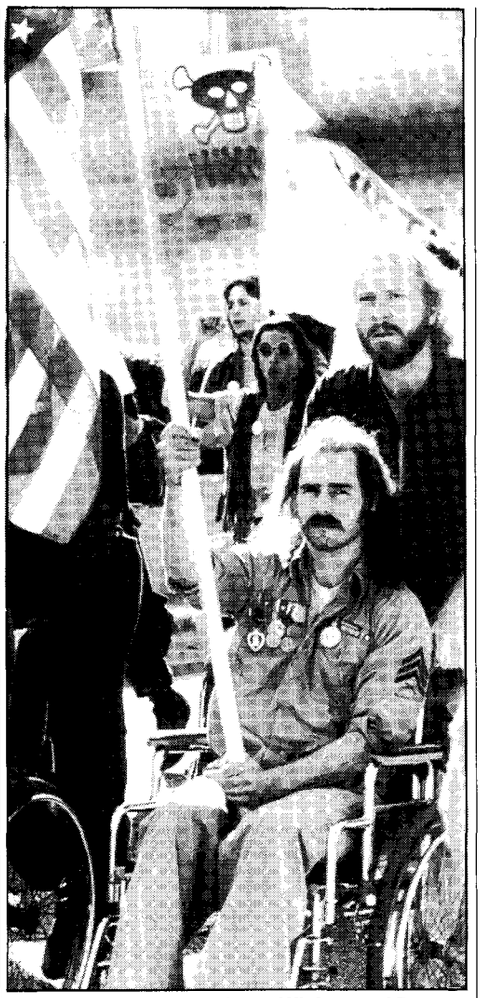
Who knows where Vietnam is any more? Who can remember how the war started and exactly when it ended? Who really needs to know, when fiction is somehow so much more *definite* than the blur of history? When Hollywood has demarcated a territory called "Vietnam" so well that we no longer need a map or a fact to help us along. For Hollywood's Vietnam has been a new frontier where history and geography melt into air. An imaginary place which, as Gilbert Adair points out in his astute book on the subject, eventually tells us more about Hollywood than it ever could about Vietnam.

This brave new war zone lies somewhere between Kilgore's immortal line of dialogue in *Apocalypse Now*: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning," and Stallone's plea at the end of *Rambo*: "All I want, and all any guy who ever fought in Vietnam wants, is for our country to love us as much as we love it." The Vietnam of the movies is strung out somewhere between *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle preparing to fight his own personal war ("It's a jungle out there") and Jon Voight's disabled veteran in *Coming Home* who gives Jane Fonda not only her first orgasm but instantaneously frizzy hair.

Vietnam is forever grunts and gooks and geeks, John Wayne's green beret and Coppola's choppers, the fabricated Russian roulette of *The Deer Hunter* and the all-engulfing jungle of *Platoon*. Somewhere in the midst of all this is that distant war, a collective trauma that still troubles the sleep of the American conscience, that makes it sit bolt upright in bed at night as the long-repressed memory floods back.

Born on the Fourth of July, Oliver Stone's powerful new film based on Ron Kovic's autobiography, is important not because of all those Oscar nominations but because it publicly accepts the emotional cost of Vietnam without trying to justify it. It's a loud, showy, rambling and at times incoherent movie that pushes through the confusion not to make some universal statement about war being a "bad thing", but rather to say quite simply that what America did in Vietnam was wrong. Through Kovic's story of an impossibly athletic and idealistic clean-cut American boy who gets his spine shattered whilst serving in Vietnam, Stone overturns many of the conventions of the Nam movie.

Stone, as he has reminded us in interview after interview, has a handle on the truth because he was *there*, and Kovic who co-wrote the script was obviously there. The late Abbie Hoffman, who advised on the anti-war demonstrations in the film, was also there in a sense. This leaves Tom Cruise to convince us that he too was there, which he does in a brilliant performance. This obsession with authenticity has been worked into the script of many Nam movies, with characters often declaring that only those who have been through the Vietnam experience can know what it was like. John Rambo on returning to Vietnam says he has "come home", which is doubly ironic when you consider that Stallone spent the war coaching tennis in a girls' school.



Patriot and peacenik: returned Vietnam vet Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise) demonstrates against the war

"Stone's achievement is in underlining the fact that patriotism and anti-war activism were not mutually exclusive as the hawks so often painted them"

Cruise transforms himself during the course of the film from goody-goody patriot to hairy peace activist and Stone, whilst terrific at portraying a man raging at his disability, is less good at showing us the more complex process of politicisation that Kovic goes through. Where Stone excels is in the portrayal of combat and its aftermath. The familiar inland swamp iconography which he managed to create so viscerally in *Platoon* is exchanged for the blinding glare of the coast. Jerky camera movements convey the impossibility of seeing amongst the sand dunes. The Vietnamese are here at least glimpsed as ordinary soldiers and Kovic's accidental killing of another American is a reminder of the staggeringly high number of US soldiers killed in so-called "friendly fire". The Americans are no more at home here than they are in the jungle and it is these hostile, hallucinatory landscapes that wore them down despite their more advanced weaponry.

Returning home, Kovic (paralysed from his mid-chest down) doesn't receive a hero's welcome but is shunted into an unbelievably squalid veterans' hospital. These episodes are as harrowing as any war scenes. He cannot walk, he is impotent, he has been betrayed by that which he loved most—his country. The whorehouses of Mexico are no more of a consolation than the oblivion of drugs and alcohol. The character who cannot accept what has happened to him seems a million miles from the benign Kovic who recently appeared on *Wogan*.

Stone's achievement is in underlining the fact that patriotism and anti-war activism were not mutually exclusive activities as the hawks so often painted them. However, as in so many portrayals of the war, women come off badly. Here they are literally whores, virginal sweethearts and repressed mothers. Kovic's impotence and the resulting exploration of what it means to be a man run parallel with the American realisation that phallic fire power didn't for once guarantee absolute victory.

This is why so many of these films endeavour to explain the war to America with scant regard for the Vietnamese. They take place in some ahistorical time, crucial for successful myth-making. They play on our ignorance and historical confusion. How many people now, for instance, realise that Robert Altman's *MASH* was about Korea and not Vietnam at all? Or that the first Rambo movie, *First Blood*, was set entirely in the States? It is through this device that, as Adair argues, the war is kept going.

This mythical quality of so many Nam movies is further enriched by presenting Vietnam as an internal war, a psychic and psychedelic war, a civil war. "The enemy was in us," says one character in Platoon. "There is a war going on right here," says a black nurse in the Bronx hospital in *Born on the Fourth of July*. The real victims of the war, we are led to believe, were not the Vietnamese but the Americans.

Stone's latest film may be guilty of some of this; yet it triumphs finally because it grabs at all those fantasies, media constructions and obscene images and forces them to confront the passing of time and the changing of the world—in other words, history. It pulls the whole bloody mess that was Vietnam back into the American dream. It plucks it out of the timeless genre of the war film and puts it back in the past. Which means that despite strenuous efforts by Rambo and the others to keep fighting, to keep the war alive, to say the war isn't over yet, Stone is brave enough to utter the unutterable. That not only did the war end a long, long time ago but that America lost.

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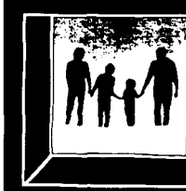

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Design

Commodity Fetishism?

Frank Mort looks at 50 years of living-room choices

What has shaped the thousand and one choices we make to give meaning to our living space? What makes us go for the lime-green satin finish instead of the floral wallpaper, the garden shed rather than the mock conservatory, the fan-assisted oven and not the microwave?

The current exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum **Household Choices: Design in Domestic Consumption** looks at fifty years of domesticity. Steering well clear of a bland history of taste, simple class reductionism or an equally crude market conspiracy, this display of images and personal testimony does force a rethink of how commodities, individual identities and social space interact "at home".

The ideal homes on offer deliberately celebrate a diversity of "choices" and lifestyles far wider than the Barrett's show house or the *House and Garden* interiors. So after a fairly predictable peep through the window of a Romford council estate with all the usual cosy-glow gas fires, Tudor beams and brasses, we meet some of the more up-to-date signs of post-modern living. Here is the DHSS bed-and-breakfast hotel, "the absolutely ideal homosexual living room," and a Bangladeshi front room in London's Brick Lane.

What comes through strongly here, what unites all the household punters, is the sheer amount of time and effort that everybody spends worrying and fantasising about their living space. Of course home-centred leisure, in the broadest meaning of the term, is one of Britain's fastest growing pursuits. But as this display underlines, leisure is also labour. More to the point, it is one of the sites where our personal identities are continually being probed and re-examined through what we buy and the objects which people our living space.

Take two issues, both suggested by the show but not really explored: the role of the consumer market and the changing nature of public and private space.

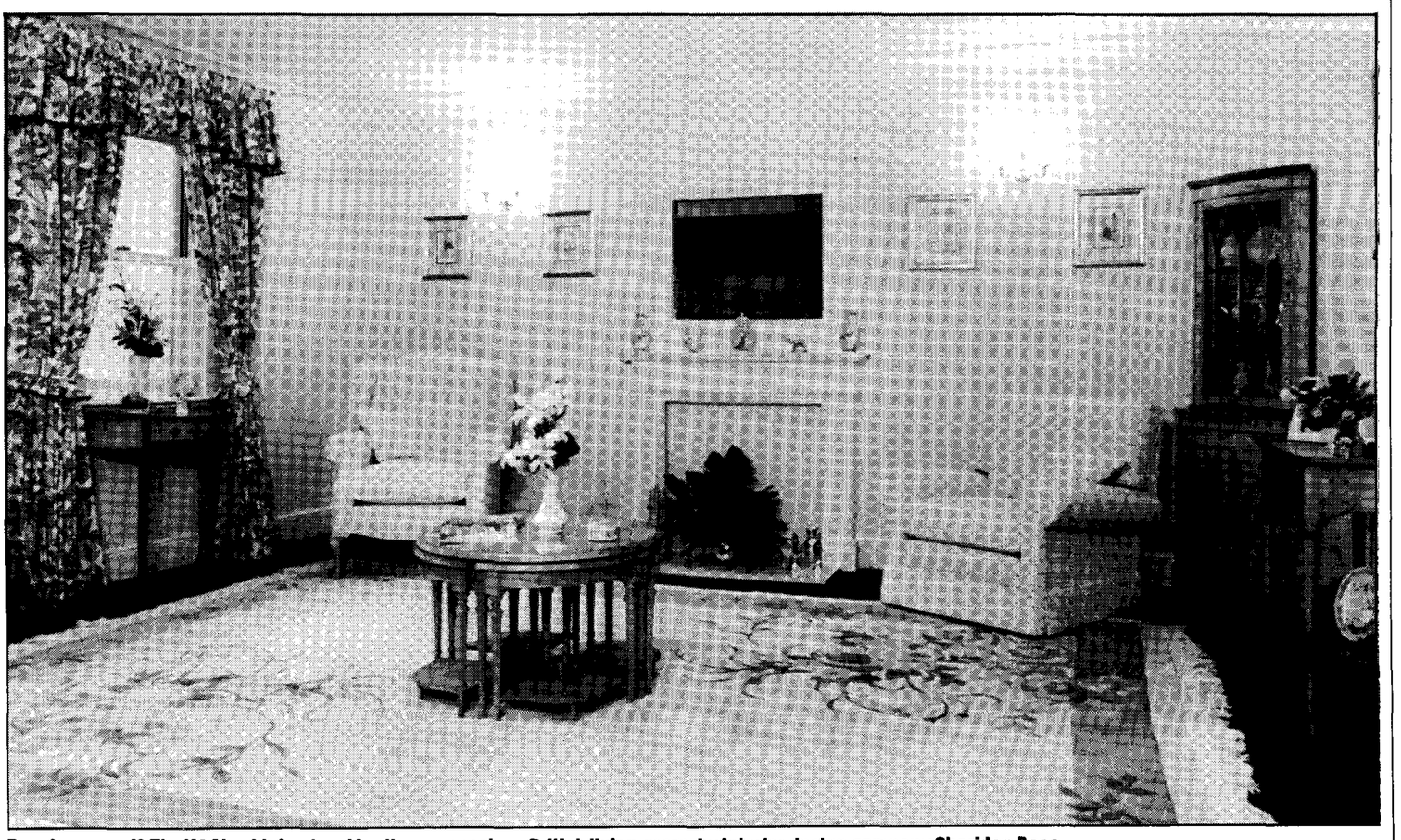
The half century of mass commodity production which *Household Choices* records has not simply reshaped our living rooms, it has transformed the landscape of our minds. The interior nature of our personal life and our relations with our co-habitors are partly fixed—made meaningful—through the commodities which proliferate in the showrooms of Argos or Heals. Whether it is family drama re-enacted as a power struggle over the TV control panel, or DIY confirming heterosexual complementarity and cosy evenings *chez nous*: either way they point to the fact that commodities fantastically assume a relation between people, to paraphrase from Marx.

But rather than lamenting it all as "commodity fetishism" or manipulation by the market, we need to know rather more about how the market commodifies social life. The 1980s saw an intensification of the aura attached to things personal and domestic through new forms of retail technology. What also took place was a growing sophistication in people's use of commodity culture to produce a series of different versions of their identity. A bear market in house prices and a retail squeeze is not going to extinguish those developments in the long term.

All of this is going on in a culture where the very boundaries of the public and private are being refashioned. Urban geographers talk of new constructions of social space, in the shopping mall or in the leisure centre, which turn the public private and vice versa. Market research points up the ways in which the growth of home-centred leisure is redefining "the home" as a multi-purpose site, where individuals group themselves via interest communities (the video or home computer) rather than through traditional interest ties.

The growth of homeworking and the complexity of post-sixties emotional arrangements has delivered a further blow to simple divisions between home and work, family and outsiders. These are "household choices" in the widest sense of the term. They are social relations written up as spatial relations and are quite as material—and influential—as the bricks and mortar or the fixtures and fittings.

But with poll tax and the property slump, home-making is now being given a nasty twist. From being the ultimate commodity, investing in your home looks like turning into a liability.



Popular appeal? The V&A's chintzed and heritage-conscious British living-room, by interior design company Sheridan Rose

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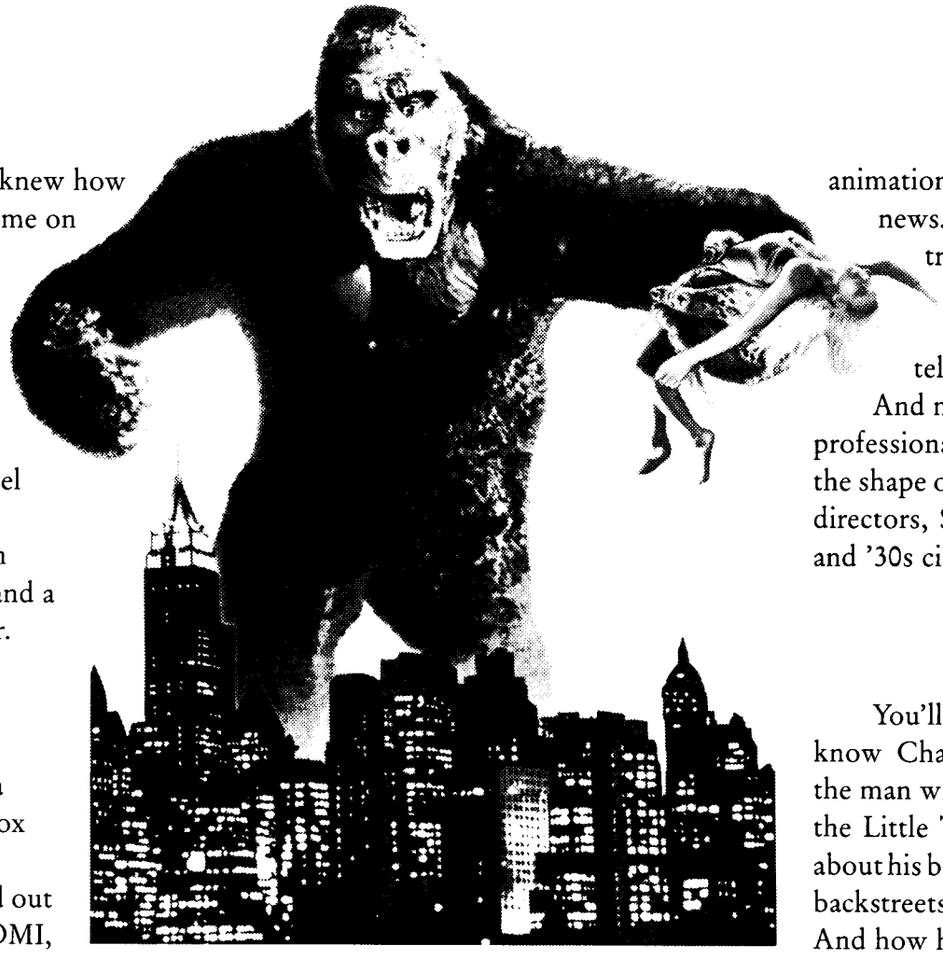
Out on the town?



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Appointments

THE DISABILITY ALLIANCE

DIRECTOR

Over 6 million people in Britain have disabilities; most rely on State benefits as their main source of income. The Disability Alliance - representing over 120 organisations - is concerned with the income needs of people with disabilities and campaigns for the introduction of an urgently needed comprehensive disability income. The Alliance's sister organisation - the Disability Alliance Educational and Research Association (DAERA) - is the leading independent resource for advice, information and training on benefits for people with disabilities, and publishes the Disability Rights Handbook.

You will take responsibility for co-ordinating the Disability Alliance's campaigning and policy work in the 1990s, along with co-ordinating the research, policy and other activities of DAERA. You will be responsible for ensuring a sound financial base - fund-raising is essential for both organisations. You need to be creative in initiating ideas and in responding to relevant issues of concern. Experience of social security and campaigning are essential, as is the ability to work to tight deadlines without secretarial backup. Experience of organising or managing a small staff group is essential, together with a commitment to maintain the established teamwork approach. You also need good written and oral communication skills, and will be required to represent the organisations externally. Understanding of disability benefits and personal experience of disability are desirable as is a knowledge of the workings of Parliament and government departments.

Salary: from Point 7 £15,936 to Point 10 £17,781 (incl. London Weighting) on AUT Researchers' scale (a fundamental review of all salaries is currently underway). 5 weeks' holiday.

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Application forms and further details from Charlotte Wellington, CRER, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.
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Salary will be on the non-clinical Lecturer scale £10,458 – £20,469 with membership of U.S.S.

Further information and application forms may be obtained from the Deputy Registrar & Secretary, Medical School, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham NG7 2UH (Tel: 0602 709381) to whom they should be returned completed by 20th April 1990.

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For application form and further particulars (Ref: 29/90) contact Staff Office, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow G1 1XQ. Applications Closing Date:— 26 March 1990.

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Further details in writing from ANN MAGUIRE.

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Applications to be received by March 23, 1990.

Interviews will be held on April 11, 1990.

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Application forms and further particulars are available from Mr R. T. Shine, Administrative Assistant, The Registry, The University, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NZ, quoting reference A90/43. The closing date for applications is 30th April 1990.

Informal enquiries should be made to Professor Martin Knapp, Deputy Director, telephone (0227) 764000, extension 7552.

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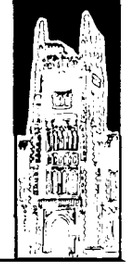

PUTTERIDGE BURY
MANAGEMENT CENTRE

Are you experienced in one of the following areas:

Trade Union Management
HRM/Personnel Management
Industrial Relations

If so, we would very much like to hear from you, as we have a number of vacancies for lecturers in our expanding Management Centre.

Salaries are up to £16,500 pa.

For further information contact Debbie Ryan, Personnel Officer, on (0582) 34111 or send full cv to her at Luton College of Higher Education, Park Square, Luton, Beds LU1 3JU.

Action For Disability (Tower Hamlets)

is seeking a

CO-ORDINATOR

to continue and develop its work.

We are an organisation of disabled people living/working in the borough, whose aim is to ascertain the needs and views of disabled people and communicate these to policy makers and service providers.

Only disabled people need apply.

The post is initially for six months, on Salary Scale Spinal Point 26, NJC 6, £13,389 per annum.

For more information and application details contact Action For Disability at: The Neighbourhood Church, Bruce Road, London E3 3HN. Tel: 980 1176.

Disabled people from all oppressed groups are encouraged to apply.

Closing date for applications: March 16, 1990.

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

MRC/ESRC Social and Applied Psychology Unit

MRC STUDENTSHIPS

Applications are invited from graduates, and those about to graduate, with a First or 2i class degree in psychology or related discipline to compete for two MRC studentships available from October, 1990.

Two areas of research are available: (1) coping with shiftwork: body rhythms and counselling (Drs Simon Folkard and David Shapiro); and (2) age and performance (Dr Angus Craig and Professor Peter Warr).

For further information, informal enquiries, and application forms, please contact Dr Michael Barkham (PhD Tutor), MRC/ESRC Social and Applied Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, The University, Sheffield S10 2TN, telephone: (0742) 756600.

Closing date for application: March 30, 1990.

University of Manchester

LECTURER IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Applications are invited for this post tenable from October 1, 1990.

Candidates should have proven research ability and an interest in teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Initial salary range £10,458 – £15,372 pa.

Further particulars and application forms (returnable by April 20) from the Registrar, The University, Manchester M13 9PL (Tel: 061-275 2028). Quote ref. 53/90/GU. For further information please write to Professor Marilyn Strathern, Department of Social Anthropology.

The University is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

CHESTNUTS
COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

Chestnuts is a purpose-built community resource in South Tottenham. It offers community arts activities, including photography, silk screen, printing and other community and arts facilities for all ages. Our community activities include an after-school club, a youth club and a weekly Over 50s Day. South Tottenham is culturally mixed and the centre has a strong commitment to developing equal opportunities and access to the Centre's resources. The staff team of 6 reflects the area's cultural diversity.

The Chestnuts Management Committee invites applications for a

PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR (Manager)

Salary: £15,570 PO1

This is a key position in the organisation. We are seeking an experienced manager/administrator to fill this demanding and rewarding post. Considerable experience of community development work in a multi-cultural environment, management experience and fundraising skills are essential. Further details and an application form are available from **Chestnuts, 280 St Ann's Road, Tottenham, London N15 5BN. Telephone 01-800 8095. Closing date for receipt of completed application forms is March 21, 1990.**

Chestnuts is striving to become an equal opportunities employer. We welcome applications from all sections of the community irrespective of race, gender or sexual orientation and we particularly welcome applications from people with disabilities who are currently under-represented in the organisation. The Centre is fully accessible to people in wheelchairs.

OV SELECTION

have a number of vacancies for temporary & permanent office staff with typing skills. We welcome enquiries from mature people as well as College leavers.

Phone Odette Veazey, OV Selection (Emp. Agy), Abford House, 15 Wilton Road, London SW1V 1LT. 01-828 8345.

SOLDEN HILL HOUSE

A Rudolf Steiner home for 30 mentally handicapped people.

RESIDENTIAL ASSISTANT

Willing to share in all aspects of daily life including craft work-shops. Experience desirable but not essential. Single accommodation only available.

Please apply with CV and references for further details to: Principal, Solden Hill House, Byfield, Daventry, Northants NN11 6UA.

AS A MATTER OF FAX: 01 739 9307

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TUC

WOMEN ACROSS EUROPE

Wednesday, May 2, 10.00am-4.30pm
Congress House, London

The TUC is holding a major Conference on the position of women in Europe before and after 1992. There will be workshops and speakers, including leading women from the European Labour Movement

Registration by March 16: £25.00

Write to: **FREEPOST, Equal Rights Department, Trades Union Congress, Congress House Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS (Please add: Ref. ERD/EW)**

Therapy

B.B. ZEITLYN PSYCHOTHERAPY TRAINING FUND

A fund has been set up for those living in Cambridge and East Anglia who wish to train as psychotherapists. Monies are available as an interest free loan to be repaid within 3 years of completion of training.

Applications to be received by 15th of April and loans to successful applicants offered from 1st of October 1990.

Those interested should write for further particulars c/o

The Chairman, B.B. Zeitlyn Psychotherapy Training Fund, Dr Jon Sklar, Psychotherapy Department, 2 Bene't Place, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, Cambs. CB2 1EL.

PSYCHOTHERAPY GROUP – ongoing. N.W. London. Tuesday evening. Contact Christine Embleton on 062882 8139 or Werner Prall 01-451 3607.

Services

JEWELLERY DESIGNER AND REPAIRER will do any jobs from designing jewellery to polishing. Contact Mark Nash on 01 985 1060 anytime after six o'clock. Based in London and Stanford-le-Hope.

Meetings

PUBLIC MEETING - WOMEN ONLY. Women Against Fundamentalism. Women's struggles against religious fundamentalism across the world. Friday 23rd March 7 pm. London Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC1.

Classified Advertising

Phone 01 739 1645

Interest Holidays

EASTER ART PROGRAM SPAIN 8 - 22 April. Comprehensive 'live-in' art program for beginners + advanced in beautifully situated olive mill. Tel UK: 0923 857760.

THE INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY & SOCIAL STUDIES

EXPLORING PSYCHOTHERAPY

A one-year introduction: Theoretical Seminars and Group Therapy.

Thursday 6 - 10 pm, starting October 1990

Write: IPSS, 77 Fordwych Road, London NW2 3TL, for further details and application forms (s.a.e)

Holiday/Travel

CORNWALL, COSY FISHERMANS COTTAGE in Mevagissey. Quiet traffic-free location one minute Harbourside and amenities. Tel: 0726 68421 evenings only please.

ISRAEL KIBBUTZ

A unique experience. If you're young, fit and willing, enjoy a working holiday (to include full board and lodging) for little more than the price of an air ticket in a most exciting country. Minimum stay 5 weeks.

Send SAE to

Kibbutz Representatives. 1A Accommodation Road, NW11 8ED Tel:- 01-458 9235

Publications

DUTCH INTERIORS, new poems by Sarah Lawson, only £1.95, from Mid Northumberland Arts Group, Town Hall, Ashington, Northumberland NE63 8RX.

Exhibitions

THE PAINTED SCREENS OF FRANK BEANLAND. Smiths' Gallery One. 56, Earlham Street, Covent Garden. London WC2H 9PU. Open to the Public: Monday 23rd - 29th April 1990. From: 10.00 a.m. - 9.00 p.m. Private View: Monday 23rd April 6.00 - 9.00 p.m. Sponsors: Michael Barclay Partnership, London & Adnams Wine Merchants, Southwold. Contact: Juliet Williams 01-735 9649.

Situations Wanted

APPOINTEE as part-time Sports Administrator seeks other jobs (work-share) in trades unions, media, or related, on either two, three day basis. Please write to Box (09) 107.

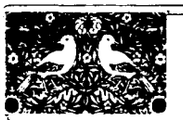
Booksellers

SCARCE BOOK SERVICE list wants 01-876 7254. Hammersmith Books, High Street. London SW13 9LR.

JOSEPH NEEDHAM, "SCIENCE & CIVILISATION IN CHINA" 7 volumes (sections 1 - 33 inclusive, not 30 - 32) Perfect condition. £70 for seven volumes. Telephone 01-485 4220.

Heartsearch

SPARKY OVER-EDUCATED FEMALE, Books Editor seeks steady relationship with unattached preferably professional man. Likes novels, theatre, classical music, food, drink. Please no toddlers, geriatrics, Tories. Photo. Please reply to Box (09) 105.



OLD FRIENDS

DOES LIFE BEGIN AT 40?

MARRIAGE, FRIENDSHIP or COMPANIONSHIP:
the introduction agency for the 40s, 50s, & 60s

Details from: Anne Brent, 18a Highbury New Park, N5 2DB Telephone: 01-226 5432

SINGLE WOMAN, 37, (son 5) South West. Doesn't believe there are any kind and funny men (30 - 45) to share walks, cinema, politics, books. Prove me wrong? Reply to Box (07) 076.

R & B/JAZZ-LOVING MALE graduate (41) seeks female soulmate to engage in conversation/debate over a glass of good wine (for a start). Near Cambridge. Photo appreciated. Please reply to Box (08) 088.

THE MIXED SALAD. A Club where unattached, cultured, and intelligent individuals can mix, share affinities, talk, relax and eat well. Membership will depend on personal interview and members will be placed on a club register. There is no age limit. Invitations will be compiled from this register and these will be extended to an equally mixed group of single men and women, people of compatible interests and tastes. Members are asked to a private Shropshire country house set in large and tranquil gardens. Harmonious and sympathetic surroundings. Exceptional scenery. Good conversation. Log fires. Telephone: 0584 73207.

NEO-RENAISSANCE WOMAN (40's) seeks understanding enlightened man (40's – 50's) for enjoying Art, music, opera, travel, (sailing?) together. Write to Box (07) 078.

SINGLE PROFESSIONAL MAN (60, County Durham) leftish, Oxbridge, rather staid, very musical, seeks female companion. I am a non-smoker, non-driver, but have piano (for duets?). Please write to Box (09) 093.

RED, GREEN AND BLUE, depending on mood. Female (24) seeks more colourful life in Herts and Beds. Replies to Box (09) 094.

MALE, 36. Proletarian, educated, subversive. Interests paradoxically bourgeois: modern arts and literature, social sciences and anarchism, hiking seeks woman for friendship, love. Please reply to Box (09) 095.

LIVELY, THOUGHTFUL AND PASSIONATE, unattached man, 35 seeks similar woman, interests: swimming, yoga, tennis, travel, humour. London or surroundings. Box (09) 096.

INDEPENDENT WOMAN in her forties, attractive, loves art, Shubert, nature, dancing; interested in politics, therapy - wants relationship with a man who can enjoy life, give and receive. North London. Box (09) 097.

SCIENTIST, VIRILE 60, artist, many interests, sailing, cycling, walking, living! Seeks adventurous lady, 'young' 50's? Share multi-activity holidays/weekends. Ideally W. London/M4/M5. Please write to Box (09) 098.

WIRRAL WOMAN, ENERGETIC, happy, petite, dark left atheist, well-travelled, loves music, thinking of moving to countryside, abroad? Seeks positive man, 50s, to share fun, adventure, abroad, warmth. Replies to Box (09) 099.

OKAY, UNUSUAL MAN seeks romance? with creative, free woman who loves hills, French walking, reading in bed together, inner quest! Please reply to Box (09) 100.

SERENDIPITY or search, I'll find you! Desirable, academic woman (42, open marriage) dreams of warm, brilliant, well-built lover, Oxford. Please write to Box (09) 101.

CRAZILY SERIOUS: Bradford based lecturer photographer (40s) planning trip John O'Groats seeks companion. Cost minimal. No strings. Are you lively, easygoing, female and free for ten days over Easter? Box (09) 102.

RETIRED MAN seeks persons/companions for sailing 34ft westerly south coast April/May possibly French canals-Med June share costs. Box (09) 103.

ATTRACTIVE, VITAL, warm woman, early 30s, publicist, seeks thoughtful, independent, creative male, wanting to have a child and to enjoy arts, music, books, cinema, food, drink and travel in France together. Box (09) 104.

WIDOWER professional, n/s, retired, leftist, still learning, seeks slimish woman for warmth, travel, growth and more. London/Kent area. Please write to Box (09) 108.

SOUGHT: by maybe compatible woman, 51: humans-loving, self-loving, literary/philosophical, academic/intellectual man; similar age or younger; serious, happy and intelligent: for loving. Please reply to Box (09) 106.

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VOLUNTEER NOTICE BOARD is a free service provided by New Statesman & Society with financial assistance from Thames Television's Help programme. Interested organisations are invited to send their copy (approximately 45 words) to Dawn King at New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London, E2 8DQ by Friday preceding publication date. Please note this service is for recruiting volunteers only. If you have salaried vacancies contact the Classified Department on 01-739-1645.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED. If you are fit, with a sense of humour, can drive, have 4-6 months to spare and would like the experience of caring for a disabled person full-time in his own flat and can start March/April, then I have a vacancy for you. Volunteers receive £37 per week + £12 entertainment grant monthly + free accommodation. For more details contact: Alan Soffert Tel. 01-736 8555. West London Area.

WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL Network urgently requires volunteers for our busy Islington office. Expenses paid. Please ring Charo or Bernadette on 01 490 2511.

NCH IN WALES – Options Project, Vale of Glamorgan. Caring helpers for volunteer work with children and young people with special needs and learning difficulties, are needed to help with shopping, sports, photography + general familiarisation with life in their local community. No experience necessary, all expenses paid, interested? Time to spare? Contact: Mary Hobbs, NCH in Wales, 68a Cowbridge Rd East, Cardiff (0222 - 222127).

INTERNATIONAL Voluntary Service runs short-term voluntary workcamps. This spring we have a series of camps throughout Britain, in conjunction with Tools For Self Reliance. Food and accommodation provided. Work: renovating handtools to be sent to community groups in developing countries. One camp is for older volunteers. Further details from IVS, 162 Upper New Walk, Leic., LE1 7QA (0533-549430).

MACEDON TRUST: An open door to homeless people needs volunteers to man it's office, help with house maintenance & spend time with residents. No qualifications necessary but patience + drivers licence are assets. Accom. + pocket money provided. North London area. We are recruiting throughout the year. Contact Malcolm Jackson at Macedon Trust, P.O. Box 126, London N17 OLB.

CHELMSFORD RAPE CRISIS Line – Volunteers Preparation Course, 73, Springfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex. Saturday 17 March, 2.00 pm. Tuesdays 20, 27 March, 3, 10 April, 7.30 pm. All women welcome. Previous counselling experience not necessary, but an understanding of the need for women to control their own recovery.

THE NAMIBIA SUPPORT Committee is seeking volunteers to help in its busy N. London office. All levels of offered commitment appreciated, reasonable travel expenses paid. Contact: Namibia Support Committee. PO Box 16, London NW5 2LW. Tel: 01 267 1941.

VOLUNTEER REQUIRED for reading and taping for blind person working in Equal Opportunities. Hrs variable + flexible, usually 15 hours p/w, to suit both parties. Some taping can be done at home, other reading duties in friendly office based in Brixton Rd, SW9. Tel: 274 0107 ext 146.

THAMES HELP

Thames Help, presented by Jackie Spreckley, is a four minute local social action programme. It appears three times a week on Thames Television at 6.50pm approximately (check TV Times for details). Here is a summary of this week's programmes.

This week we are looking at addictions.

Tuesday 13th March - No Smoking Day

Tomorrow is No Smoking Day when smokers all over the country are encouraged to say "No Ta!" to that next cigarette. That is the slogan of the No Smoking Day Campaign. Tonight we meet Rita Brown, a HELP viewer who pledged last year to give up her 40 year smoking habit.

Wednesday 14th March - Tranquilizer Addiction

A year ago Veronica Bruck could not do a simple thing like take her daughter to the park, she was seriously ill and felt her life was not worth living. She was one of the estimated 3.5 million people who are dependent on minor tranquilizers. We find out about the help Veronica received from the self-help group TRANX UK and look at her struggle to come to terms with a life without Valium.

For more information, contact:

TRANX UK,
25a Masons Avenue, Wealdstone, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 5AH.
Tel: 01-427 2065 or 01-427 2827 (24 hour answering machine).

Thursday 15th March - Alcohol

Behind the pain and anguish of the lives of problem drinkers lie the hidden stories of the families and friends that also suffer. Susan Franks' life used to be dominated by her husband's drinking. Tonight we look at how she learnt to jump off the roundabout that was destroying her marriage, by getting support from a self-help group of people who had been in the same situation as herself.

Phone after the programme for more details on 01-388 8282.

THAMES TELEVISION

Thames Help, Thames Television PLC, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9LL. Telephone: 01-387 9494.

SCARBOROUGH CARERS Sitting Service needs Volunteers to give carers of frail, elderly or disabled people a break. If you can commit yourself to one half day per week please contact us. Sitters will be given training and support. Phone: Mrs A Moodie 0723 362205.

GRIMSBY and CLEETHORPES District Victims Support. Victims of crime need support, help and advice. Volunteers are needed. Write or phone Sylvia Moss, Co-ordinator, 14 Town Hall St, Grimsby, South Humberside DN31 1HN. (0472) 250251.

VOLUNTEERS: sought by the West London Day Centre for homeless and rootless people - if you are considering voluntary work and would like to know more, why not attend a free training day? Please telephone Andrew Thomas on 01 402 5468. Drive, flexibility + commitment required.

THE FAMILY COURTS Service are looking for volunteers to help run two Saturday Access Centres in South London where divorced or separated families can spend time with their children. Please give us a ring on: 01-672 2682.

HELP URGENTLY NEEDED by the Civil Liberties Trust library and information services. Work involves answering enquiries, organising our collection of books & reports, building our press cuttings files, gathering information, entering data onto computerised databank and with much more. Library experience useful but not essential. Contact Chris Jones at CLT, 21 Tabard St, London SE1 4LA. Tel: 403 3888 if you are free 1 or more days a week during the day (Mon - Fri).

INTERNATIONAL Voluntary Service recruits volunteers to work on projects throughout eastern Europe, every summer. We are organising a Study Weekend (6-8 April, Leicester) as an introduction to the programme, and wider issues relating to eastern Europe. A variety of speakers and workshops. Further details from IVS, 162 Upper New Walk, Leicester, LE1 7QA. Tel: 0533-549430.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL For Civil Liberties urgently needs help with the despatch of publications. If interested please contact: Marion on 01-403 3888.

CHESTER AID to the Homeless are looking for Volunteer Residential workers. Full board, lodgings and pocket money paid. Also paid holidays and travel expenses. Further information please ring Anita Presford on 0244 318360 or write to: Roodee House, 22 Grosvenor St. Chester CH1 2DD.

BRISTOL: Full Time Volunteer needed to work with single homeless men in 50 bed hostel in Bristol for a minimum period of six months. Separate accommodation provided, plus £40.50 p/w. Please contact Julie Lord at Redwood House, 1 Wade Street, St Judes, Bristol BS2 9DS. Tel (0272) 556358.

VOLUNTARY Housing Workers needed now. Groups running projects for single homeless people throughout UK urgently require Volunteer workers to help in the running, and day-to-day life of their houses. No experience or qualifications are needed. Workers receive board and lodging, plus pocket money. Six months minimum. The work is demanding, but never dull. Please send SAE for more information & application form: TPW Recruitment, Homes for Homeless People (NS), Smithfield House, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6BS. (Tel: 021-622 1502).

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NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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Chief Executive Pat Coyne

Contributors

Aziz al-Azmeh is professor of Islamic studies at the University of Exeter. **Robert Carver** is a playwright and filmmaker, his latest play *A Beggar on Horseback* is to be broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 24 April. **Alexander Cockburn** is author of *Corruptions of Empire* and co-author of *The Fate of the Forest*. **Kathryn Dodd** is research associate at the Thomas Coram Institute. **Carl Gardner** is author of *Consuming Passion: the rise of retail culture*. **Margaret Hodge** is Chair of Islington Borough Council. **R W Johnson** is a Fellow of Magdalene College, Oxford. **Lucasta Miller** is an English graduate from Oxford University. **Paul Morley** is a presenter on *The Late Show*. **Michael Scott** lectures at the School of Computer Applications, Dublin City University. **Rose Shapiro** is a freelance journalist, *Good Housekeeping* Magazine's health writer and author of *Contraception: a practical and political guide*. **Mark Sinker** is a freelance critic and occasional editor of the underground journal *Virtual Space*. **David Sox** lectures in history at the American School in London and is author of a forthcoming book *Bachelors of Art*, coming out this spring. **Donald Sturrock** is a BBC producer, his film about Alfred Schnittke *Words Return to Music* will be broadcast this summer.

Incorporating 'The Nation', 'The Athenaeum'; and 'The Week-end Review'.
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ENDGAMES

WEEKEND COMPETITION

No 3115 Set by Tiny Tim
Jaunty hints, as found in women's magazines, to ease everyday chores.

Report by Tiny Tim
It's awesome, the power of the press. You roll back from the *Bricklayer's Arms* one Friday afternoon (leaving behind a comatose Tom Foolery) and set some sort of comp; next thing you know, a class of schoolkids in Bolton, Lancashire, have been given it for their homework. Apologies, then, to David Stirzaker, Brian Tinniswood, Gavin Simpson, James S Mahon, Lisa McKellen, David Hall, Andrea Thompson, Matthew Livesey, Joanna Chadwick, Joanna Freek, Lisa Edwards, Abbie Cook, Andrew Horrocks, P Baldwin, and Chris Dagnall, all aged 12 or 13.

No fewer than three entrants accused me of plagiarising this comp from the pages of *Viz* magazine, which I gather runs a similar feature. I think I can honestly say I have never read that organ in my life. Anyway, there's no copyright in ideas.

The comp brought in a lot of entries from people whose names I don't remember seeing before. *Viz* readers, no doubt. It certainly foxed some of the regulars, many of whom clearly haven't read a women's magazine since 1937. £3 per entry printed, and honourable mentions for David Ealey, Sue McCarthy, and Michael Birt, who didn't quite make it.

Cover the base of burned saucepan with malt vinegar and boil for ten minutes. The burn comes off in flakes. Dry out and serve as vinegar-flavoured crisps.

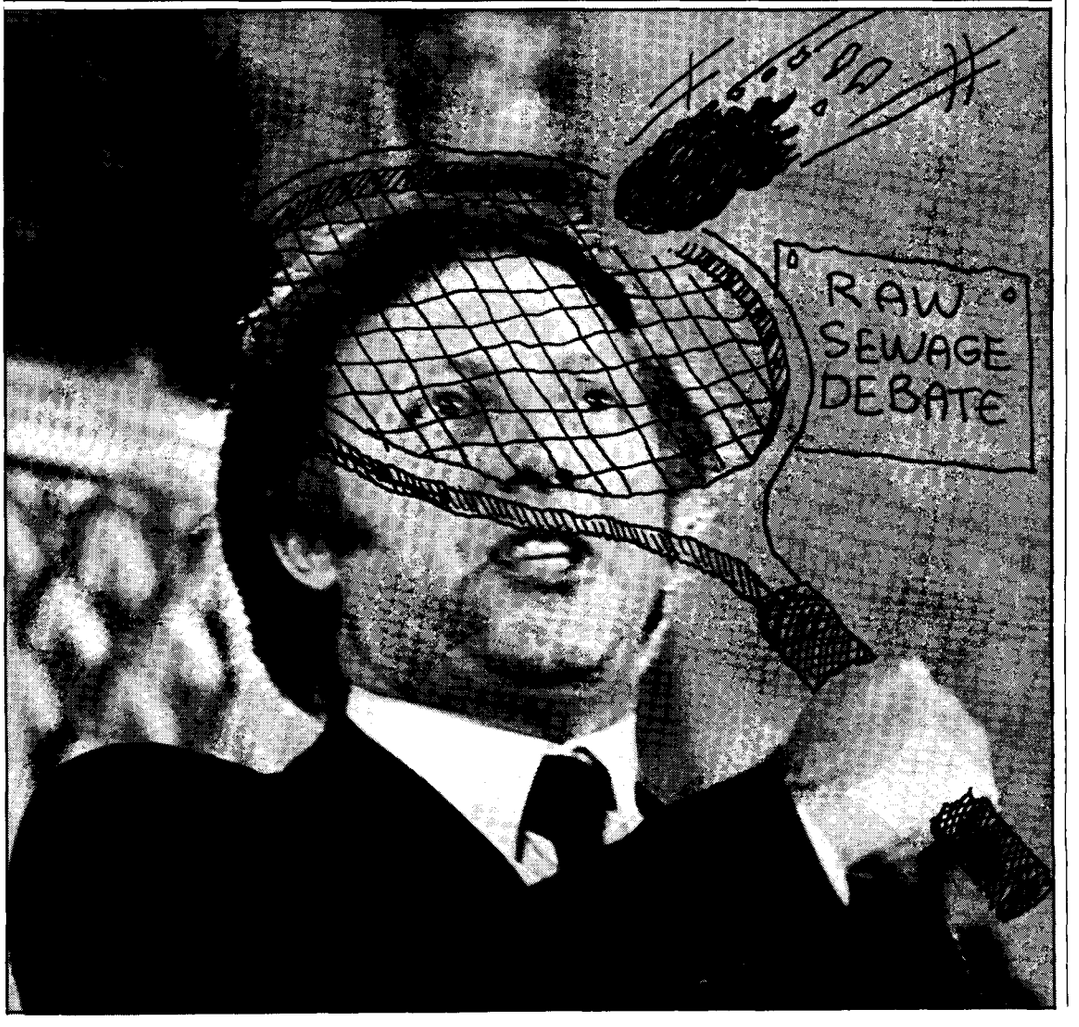
To give meat past its best that veal-like look, soak in bleach overnight. Fish also benefit from this.

Philip McCormac

Have you overfilled your bath? By this simple method you will never have a flood again. Before turning on the taps make sure that you put down a large bowl or bucket by the side of the bath, and into it put a plastic or rubber hose, with the end hooked over the bath. If the bath is overfilled the water will simply run into the container, instead of all over the floor.

Throwing away nicely shaped yoghurt pots always seems a terrible waste. Make good use of them by using them as outer pots to ones in use. The double thickness of plastic makes the container extra sturdy (important when children are using them) and helps keeps the contents

GRAFFITI BY PAIGE



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cool.

Katie Mallett

Snapped shoelaces: the old nautical craft of splicing ropes by knotting the individual fibres works equally well on a smaller scale. All you need is a powerful magnifying-glass, steady hands and a modicum of patience.

Peter Norman

Don't throw away your old toothbrushes. The heads of four or five can be glued together on a piece of wood to make a cheap but effective nail brush.

The blank margins of old newspapers can be cut off and used for shopping lists.

Liven up your fireworks night—and save money—by throwing flat batteries and empty aerosol containers on to the bonfire. They explode with a loud bang and will add a touch of danger to what is all too often a disappointing evening.

Simon Herbertson and Pippa Long

Slimmers: use sand in your tea or coffee instead of sugar. Not only does it contain no calories, but it doesn't dissolve and can be used more than once.

Lou Tuntown

Nitric acid will quite quickly remove stains from silver-ware, but don't leave immersed too long.

Pascoe Polglaze

Before you throw away that old woven carpet, why not try unpicking it? Carpet backing is made from very strong thread which makes ideal garden twine. Even quite a small dining-room carpet will yield enough twine to last for years. Hint: don't use your nails, try a meat-skewer.

Noel Petty

Store refrigerator items in alphabetical order—top to bottom, left to right—to save time when searching for a particular food.

M Rainey

To achieve that "fresh as a daisy" smell in your clothes, never use plain water in your steam iron. Always use instead this simple recipe: 500g of daisies (*margherita difficilis*, but any daisy will do) boiled for 30 mins in a litre of soft water and left to stand for three days. Strain, freeze, and thaw.

Iain Halliday

Empty toothpaste tubes can be rinsed in hot water and gently teased back into shape by squeezing the edge of the flattened tube while at the same time force-filling with boiling water from an empty washing-up liquid bottle. They can be refilled with (a) grouting cement (using icing pump with *fine* nozzle for greatest pressure) for awkward interstices, or (b) home-made fish pates for picnic snacks, or (c) weedkillers for gaps in paving stones.

A rusted paper-clip can be restored to shiny perfection by gently rubbing *all* rusted surfaces with glass paper until all traces of rust are removed (take care not to destroy shape), and then rinsing the clip, drying thoroughly with a soft towel before finishing overnight in the airing cupboard. Note: it is worth treating two or three clips at the same time.

D A Prince

Save yourself the bother of scrubbing rings from the bath by positioning a Plimsoll line of cling-film around the inside before filling it to a level covered by the plastic. After bathing simply remove the cling film revealing—hey presto!—a bath as clean as before.

R Clarke

Is the Tory government getting you down? Why not stand against Mrs Thatcher yourself in her Finchley constituency next election? Now is the time to find out about the cost of printing leaflets, getting your hair done etc.

Cancelling your subscripton to *NSS* is a false economy. The plastic bags it's posted in make ideal wrapping for sandwiches.

Janet Mearns

No 3118 Set by Tom Foolery

Boswell gave us Johnson's tour of the Hebrides. Give us Boswell on Johnson in Basingstoke, Torremolinos, Belfast, or anywhere you think Johnsonian reflections would be apposite. 250 words max and in by 22 March.

CHESS

1990 is going to be a busy year for competitive chess. Amongst other things on the agenda will be a match for the world championship, tournaments in all zones for qualification to the interzonal stage of the next championship cycle, qualifying tournaments for the next World Cup grand prix series, and the biennial Olympiad in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. But nowadays this hectic schedule is normal. Each year is busier than the last, with more strong tournaments and more matches to fit in. Surely any enthusiast will be pleased by this flourishing state of affairs?

I suppose it's churlish to complain. But the world needs a few churls, and there is a negative side to the modern merry-go-round. More may not mean worse, but it may well mean increasingly less creative and original. There is a pressure so great and so uniform on modern masters that it shapes almost all of them into the same sort of style, like pebbles worn smooth by the action of the sea. Before the modern era there was an individuality to the leading masters that stamped their games distinctively their own. Think of the battling complexity of Lasker, the delicate artistry of Reti, the effortless clarity of Capablanca, the mysterious planning that Nimzowitsch insisted was all part of his system, and the almost spiritual grandeur of Rubinstein's conceptions. Chess is a finite game and at some point diminishing marginal returns, reflecting the accumulation of our past experience, will deprive it of the interest it held in the past. As with motor cars engineered to a tight aerodynamic specification, the games of the modern technical/practical master all look very much the same. Maybe someone wins, and someone loses. But the result doesn't have any greater significance.

Consider a brilliancy from the youth of tournament play. Cue for a game. It may well be familiar to you. That's part of the point. We are all plagiarists now, and there are so many paths that we are too knowing to take.

Rubinstein-Hromadka, Mahrisch Ostrau 1923 1 e4 e5 2 f4 Bc5 3 Nf3 d6 4 Nc3 Nf6 5 Bc4 Nc6 6 d3 Bg4 A bit optimistic to imagine that Black can already afford to play so aggressively. A sounder alternative is 6... Be6, since doubled e-pawns would be no weakness in this position. But what would a modern master play? Not the King's Gambit for a start! **7 h3** Unfortunately the conclusion has to be that this move, despite appearing in two truly glorious games (Chigorin-Pillsbury, Hastings 1895 and the present game), is not objectively best. What White should play is 7 Na4!, as in Alekhine-Teichmann, Berlin 1921, and Balashov-Matanovic, Skopje 1970 (7 Na4 Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Nd4 9 Qd1 b5 10 Bxf7+! Kxf7 11 Nxc5 dxc5 12 fxe5 Nd7 13 c3 Ne6 14 0-0+ Ke8 15 d4 and Black was overrun by the White centre pawns). Any technically competent modern master knows this, so from a practical point of view the rest of the game becomes just an irrelevancy. To be original in this area you would have to find something good against 7 Na4—and that's impossible. **7... Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Nd4?** Wrong! What Black should play is 8... exf4 and if 9 Qxf4 then 9... Ne5, or if 9 Bxf4 then 9... Nd4 10 Qd1 (10 Qg3 Nh5) c6 followed by d6-d5. **9 Qg3 Qe7** 9... Nxc2+ was known from the Chigorin-Pillsbury game. After 10 Kd1 Nxa1 11 Qxg7 Kd7 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 Rf1 White had a raging attack. However, 9... 0-0 and 9... exf4 (e.g., 10 Qxg7 Rf8 11 Kd1 Qe7 12 Rf1 etc) could also be considered—but won't be because the technical/practical master is not going to pass this way again. **10 fxe5 dxe5 11 Kd1** So White can no longer castle. But he has the two Bishops and the f-file, and his King will in any case be comfortable on c2. **11... c6 12 a4 Rg8 13 Rf1 h6 14 Ne2!** To exchange Black's best piece and prepare c3 and Kc2. **14... 0-0-0 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 16 c3 Bb6 17 a5 Bc7 18 Be3 Kb8 19 Kc2 Ka8 20 Rf3 Nd5!** Black's position offers few active possibilities, but he finds one tactical point. If now 21 exd5 cxd5 22 Bb3 e4 23 Bf4 exf3 24 Bxc7 Qe2+ and Black wins. **21 Bg1 Nf4 22 Qf2 Bb8 23 g3! Nxh3 24 Rxf7 Qd6** If he had played 24... Nxf2, Hromadka would have lost without the fireworks after 25 Rxe7 Rgf8 26 Rxg7. **25 Qb6! Rd7** He has to defend b7, the consequences of taking the Queen being 25... axb6 26 axb6+ Ba7 27 Rxa7+ Kb8 28 Rfxb7+ Kc8 29 Ba6. **26 Bc5!! Rxf7 There was nothing else. If 26... Qc7, just 27 Qxc7 and the Rg8 hangs after recaptures on c7. 27 Bxd6 Rf2+ 28 Qxf2 Nxf2 29 Bc5 1-0**

A beautiful game, but as you see from the notes it has become a beautiful irrelevance. No sensible master could play like that again, either as White or Black.

Am I being too negative? Is there not still scope for creativity and the elaboration of original styles? Undoubtedly there is less scope, but Michael Adams for one promises great things, not because of his excellent results, but because of his style. He is often called "dull"—the tribute that incomprehension also paid to Petrosian and Karpov. The next game is not dull, but exhibits a calm progression: Neutralisation, Preparation, Exploitation.

Adams-Spraggett, Hastings 1990. Caro-Kann Defence. 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Nf6 5 Nxf6+ gxf6 6 c3 Bf5 7 Nf3 e6 8 g3 Nd7 9 Bg2 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 White has now effectively neutralised Black's active possibilities in the g-file. There follows a phase of preparation. The main characteristics of this early middle-game process are: a) improve the position of your own pieces, and b) exchange off your opponent's good pieces. **11 Nh4 Bg6 12 a4 a5 13 Bf4 Nb6 14 Qb3 Bd3 15 Rfd1 Bc4 16 Qc2 Nd5 17 b3 Nxf4 18 bxc4 Nxg2 19 Nxg2 Qc7 20 Rab1 b6** Now for the stage of exploitation. Since Black has a dark-squared Bishop White assaults the light squares and the open ranks behind Black's weakened pawns. **21 d5! cxd5 22 cxd5 Rac8 23 dxe6 fxe6 24 Nf4 Rfe8 25 Qb3 Bh6 26 Nxe6 Qxc3 27 Qxc3 Rxc3 28 Rxb6 Rc4 29 Rd7 Rc1+ 30 Kg2 Rc2 31 Kf3 Ra2** White has only a small force to attack with, but it is enough. **32 Nc7 Ree2 33 Rd8+ Bf8 34 Kg4 Rxf2 35 h4 Rxa4+ 36 Kh3 Raa2 37 Ne6 1-0 A pure game amid all this decadence!** *George Botterill*

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